


THE RED PATRIOT



by

WILLIAM O. STODDARD



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THE RED PATRIOT

A STORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

By WILLIAM O. STODDARD.

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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, NEW YORK.



Up came Vine's carbine.

(See page 87.)

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*A STORY
OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*

BY

WILLIAM O. STODDARD

AUTHOR OF CROWDED OUT O' CROFIELD, LITTLE SMOKE,
THE WINDFALL, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY B. WEST CLINEDINST



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THE RED PATRIOT.

CHAPTER I.

THE VALLEY VILLAGE.

“OHN!” she exclaimed. “You’ve been fighting again. You’re a wicked old Indian. Come right on into the house!”

He looked like a badly used-up Indian, and he had limped in spite of himself when he came through her gateway.

She was a strongly built and very comely middle-aged woman, dressed in a home-made jeans gown. Her hair was decidedly red, and the expression of her face promised more than ordinary decision of character, if not also promptness of temper. Nevertheless, it was a kindly face, full of intelligence, and just now it carried a pretty dark cloud of anxiety.

The red man tried to avoid limping, as he walked after her into the commodious, comfortable-looking log house, that stood back about twenty paces from the gate. He went in, too, with somewhat the air of a man who had

come to his own home to be taken care of. He had need of care, as the "medicine squaw" quickly discovered. He had several cuts to show, and Mrs. Irwin, as he almost succeeded in calling her, showed not only knowledge but probable practice by the skill and rapidity with which she attended to the proofs that he had been fighting.

"There!" she said. "They'll heal up. Glad I had some plaster left, but I must scrape some pine-tree gum and get a lot of tallow. There's no telling who's going to be wounded next. These are awful times!"

"Ugh!" he replied. "John get gum. On tree. Heap shoot come. Heap cut. Ugh!"

"I'm afraid so," she said thoughtfully. "I shall want a lot of old linen. If I had flax I'd weave just for bandages."

"Ugh!" said John, as if he had kept the best to the last, and opening the front of his buckskin hunting shirt. "Seneca bullet."

"I declare!" exclaimed his surgeon in blue jeans. "A little to the right and it would have killed you. Glad you're tough. But it's pretty angry. I'll see to it."

The bullet wound was not really dangerous, for it had only made a deep scar on his side, but it needed dressing. Mere bruises went for nothing, and the battered red man did not at all conceal the pride he felt

concerning all his war damages. They were something like medals of honor.

"John," she said at last, "I'll cure you right up, but I don't want to hear any of your awful stories. I don't want to know what you did. But the Senecas aren't coming this way, are they?"

"Six Nation no come so far," he replied. "All Jersey people heap safe. Seneca 'calp York people. 'Calp Pen'vany people. 'Calp heap sojer. All keep away from John own country. Ugh! John go out on more warpath pretty soon."

"It's all war!" she said. "It's too bad for all of us! Go lie down! I'll get you something to eat. Take that blanket."

Perhaps the fever of his hurts made the hot day seem hotter, for he seemed glad to get out of the house. He took his surgical treatment for granted. It was the business of a squaw to do up a wounded warrior. So he took the proffered blanket and walked out to lie down under a tree.

If, however, John's fighting had been done in the Susquehanna River country, so far away, he had exhibited all the iron endurance of his race in getting back at all to this west Jersey valley, on the upper waters of the Delaware. He had been anything but a handsome man at his best before his face was bruised or his

head cut and bandaged. Now, however, as he lay stretched out under the tree, one could see that his tall, broad frame was of more than ordinary power. He was likely to prove an ugly antagonist for even the redoubted fighters of the famous Six Nations.

In the house there was an increasing warmth, for its mistress had blown the embers in the fireplace and had put on fuel, making remarks to herself about being compelled to "feed up that old Delaware."

"But I don't care how many Senecas he kills," she added. "All of those New York tribes are King George's Indians."

Up to this date, nevertheless, the rebellious American subjects of the British crown had cherished a hope that the red men would not openly take sides against them in their war for independence. During the first year of the war, indeed, the Americans had stoutly maintained that they were contending only against unjust taxation, not by any means as rebels against their lawful King. Not until the 4th of July of this summer of 1776 had there been a distinct purpose avowed of making a new nation to take care of the regions claimed by the thirteen colonies. The first Congress of this new nation was now sitting at Philadelphia, and its army, under General George Washington, was at

New York face to face with the army of King George III, under General Howe.

All along the border, westward and northward, the red men were beginning to show precisely the spirit that might have been expected. Their fights in time past had been mainly with their near neighbors the settlers, while all their presents of good things had come to them from the King beyond the sea through his red-coated officers. So they were turning against the colonies on account both of old revenges and expected new gifts.

“Ugh!” growled the red man under the tree. “Pow-a-hi-tun-ka feel good. Get well. ’Calp more Seneca. Ugh!”

While speaking, he had drawn from under his hunting shirt two of the ghastly trophies of Indian warfare. He had not been hurt for nothing, and he looked at the scalps with eyes which blazed with pride. One of them he put down upon the grass, remarking of it, “Seneca chief!” but of the other he declared, almost inquiringly, “Mohawk? Mebbe Onondaga? Fight hard. Heap brave. Got he ’calp! Ugh!”

In the house his kindly surgeon was busy with a saucepan and a slice of venison, of which she said:

“Glad to have it eaten up and out o’ the way. ’Twouldn’t ha’ kept another day this weather. But what we’re going to do I don’t know. Vine’ll have to

do all the crop-gathering on this farm this year. Oh, how I wish I could get news from his father! And from the army. God bless 'em all! I s'pose they're fighting. Maybe Tom's been killed or he's sick. I mustn't let myself think. Oh, dear! And there are so many pesky Tories all up and down the country. They outnumber us Whigs, now so many of our men are gone to the war."

It was a beautiful valley among densely wooded hills. The farms and the dwellings were scattered along the banks of a considerable stream, running westerly toward the Delaware. From this it could be determined that the Irwin place and its surroundings lay beyond the dividing ridge which separates the eastern and western waters of what is now the State of New Jersey. The hills on either side of the valley were high and rugged, and as yet no woodchopper's axe had been at work to any extent among them. The broad valley itself had an exceedingly prosperous appearance. It was rich in orchards and meadows, while the sloping pasture lands were liberally dotted with flocks and herds. Some of the dwellings were even handsome, the abodes of wealth, culture, and rural aristocracy.

Down the creek, full two miles as the crow flies and more by the winding road, there was a bridge, with a span the elevation of which told of more water at other

seasons than was running now in the early autumn. By the bridge, on this side of the stream, were a blacksmith shop, a tavern, a meetinghouse, and a small cluster of dwellings. This was known as Irwin's Hollow, and the log house to which the red man had gone to be healed of his wounds was one of the first that had been erected when the valley was settled.

There are always more men idling around a country village just before corn husking begins than can be found there after the first heavy frost. Still, it was a special reason that brought them all to the front of the blacksmith shop in such an excited way. Men and boys were there, jostling each other and craning forward to see and hear, for a man had come galloping across the bridge, and had dismounted before the shop shouting for the smith.

"Horse!" he exclaimed as the leather-aproned worker dropped a rod of iron into the cooling tub and hurried out. "Can you get me a horse? This one's blown."

"Dead broke down," responded the smith, looking at the panting beast from which the man had thrown himself. "So are you. Neighbor, who are ye? What's your hurry?"

"Walter Baker!" loudly exclaimed a woman's voice from somewhere in the crowd. "Don't you see? He's

from the army!—Oh, man! what's the news from New York? For God's sake! My husband is with Washington."

"God bless you, ma'am!" he responded. "God keep him! But we have lost New York. I am carrying dispatches to Congress. Get me a horse——"

"Not in this village!" shouted another, a deep-toned, angry voice. "Hurrah for the King! Hurrah for General Howe! Mr. Washington and his traitors have met their masters. Down with the Congress! No horse for a traitor! We'll take those dispatches, if you please."

Shrill and clear, but quivering with excitement, sounding almost over their heads, came:

"Mrs. Cameron! Mrs. Cameron! I'll take the dispatches to Congress. I'm here, on Black Turk! Tell him my father's in the army."

The exhausted courier had actually fallen in a half-fainting way, but he could hear the boy, and he half-raised himself and answered eagerly:

"Boy? Boy? Where is he? Take them. They are for Mr. Reed, the Secretary, or for President Hancock. Ride! We lost the battle and the city, but we have not lost our freedom yet. The men fought well!"

"My father is in the New Jersey line," said the boy

proudly. "I'm Vine Irwin. That Tory is my uncle, but he can't keep me from going."

"Yes, I can, you young rebel! I can keep your horse."

"Robert Van Tine!" shouted Mrs. Cameron. "Oh, men! Let the b'ye have his coult and ride wi' the news. I gave my husband and I'd give my son if I had one. So would Hannah Irwin. God send we are not both widows the day. Jump, Vi! Have ye the papers?—Nay, nay, Rob Van Tine! Ye shall no tooch the coult!"

A Scotch accent, slight at the first, grew stronger as she became more excited, and Mrs. Cameron's robust form squared itself between the burly Tory and the skittish-looking, barebacked black horse which another boy was holding while Vine Irwin took a packet and a few words of instructions from the used-up bearer of dispatches.

"I came by way of Morris County," he said. "The British and Hessians hold the other roads. Look out for Tories! Mount and ride! Hurrah for Washington! Hurrah for Liberty! I'd have stood it through but for the bayonet hurt in my side."

It was a wounded man who had ridden so fast and so far with Washington's errand to Hancock.

"Mon!" said Mrs. Cameron to the soldier. "Ye'll coom to my ain hoose."

Vine was already on Turk's back, and just then he shouted:

"Mrs. Cameron, let Jessie go and tell mother. Tell her I knew she'd let me go. Hurrah! I'm off!"

He was escaping from Robert Van Tine's grasp only because of several men and women who crowded between them.

"I'll go tell her my ain sel'," she said.

The heels of Turk were in the air for a moment, and then his head. That caper performed, away he went down the valley road, followed by a mingled chorus of encouraging cheers and of angry, profane abuse from the crowd in front of the blacksmith's shop.

It seemed to be pretty plainly manifested that the friends of Congress were the more numerous party, and that they included decidedly the great majority of the boys. If any boy there was one of King George's boys, he was not saying much about it just now. The boys whose fathers and brothers were with Washington had been chilled and stunned by the bad news for a moment, but the next thing they were getting angry. As for the men, the numbers were not so well divided, for the Hollow had sent its full share of patriots to the Continental army, while the Tories as yet were all there.

It was awful news to hear. Up to that day it had looked like a continued stream of victories for the colo-



Away he went down the road.

nies. There had been the battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill, and the capture of Boston and the brilliant defence of Fort Moultrie in South Carolina. Independence had been declared on the Fourth of July, and the enthusiasm of the people had grown hot and their hopes extravagant.

They had believed Washington able to beat any number of British and Hessians, for the American farmers knew very little about war.

Away rode Vine Irwin, and he and his dispatches were all that the black colt had to carry. He was a splendid fellow, the colt, and he was about four years old. No saddle, a light bridle, no baggage, and Turk screamed in his coltish way with the delight he felt at not being held in and at being off upon some kind of lark with Vine. As for him, not quite so handsome as Turk, he was four times as old, and he carried very little weight. That is, he might have been called thin and lanky, although his breadth of shoulder was good for his age. There was no fat on him. His sinewy young arms were bare to the elbow, because his "hickory" shirt sleeves were rolled up, and it made his wrists and hands look larger. His feet were bare, but a battered straw hat was on his head for the first mile. After that it was floating down the creek, for a gust of wind took it off and lodged it there.

There had been a strong feeling of exhilaration at first in the excitement of taking up so great an errand, and Vine's face had been almost as red as his closely curling hair, while his blue-gray eyes danced with bright flashes, making him for the moment handsomer than even Turk. Then the news came back to him. The colt could not know that, but he came down to a long, easy gallop that he could keep up with so little to carry. Heavier and heavier grew Vine's own burden, and every time he touched the parcel of dispatches he had belted at his waist it seemed to have grown larger. It was very heavy, the tidings of Washington's defeat, and it did not help him that he knew nothing of his father's fate or that of any other of the Hollow men in the great battle on Long Island. What if they were all killed?

Gust after gust of wind came sweeping down from the westerly hills, and the sky rapidly grew darker. All the sunshine had gone out of the day of evil tidings, and thunder began to mutter along the misty horizon.

"Storm coming," said Vine. "Who cares? I don't. All I want is to get to Philadelphia. Jessie'll tell mother. I hope she won't worry. I don't believe father's killed, but I wish I knew. Only a part of Washington's men were killed. Oh, how I wish I was there!"

That was a double-barreled wish, for it meant in the

army with his father at one minute, and the next it meant in Philadelphia with his dispatches. These were in a waterproof leather case, and he was not worried about them. The clouds grew black now, and hung low, and the lightning began to play among them.

“Getting dark?” he said. “I guess it is! I shan’t be able to see the road pretty soon. There it comes! —What is it, Turk?”

A blinding flash of lightning came, and with it a rattling peal of thunder, and then a roaring burst of wind was followed by a loud, crashing sound as a great tree, smitten by the lightning, came shivering down across the road.

Turk had halted in time, for the tree lay twenty paces ahead of them.

“It mustn’t stop me!” shouted Vine. “Whoop, Turk! Over!”

Only Vine’s bare heels instead of spurs dug into the sides of the colt, but he sprang forward, and a splendid, elastic bound carried him and his brave young rider over the tree trunk. Not even the lightning’s work had delayed Washington’s dispatches to the Continental Congress.

On, at a mere canter now, but it ate up the distance fast enough. Down poured the rain in torrents upon the bareheaded rider, but he had no thought of halting.

It was Turk himself who discerned through the deepening gloom a great hollow log water trough at the roadside, and he paused to put his thirsty nose into it. Of course there was a house behind the fence gate near the trough, and Vine shouted "Ho!" only once before there were forms and faces at the door and windows.

"Ho!" he called out again. "Is this the right road to Philadelphia?"

"Aye, man, this is thy road," replied a shrill, quavering voice in the doorway. "Thou art from the north. Hast thou news from the war? How fares it with George Washington and the good men who are with him?"

"Quakers!" thought Vine. "But they're Whigs. You can see that," and he said aloud:

"Bad news, ma'am. I've dispatches from him to Congress. There's been a great battle. We are beaten some. The British have captured New York, but Washington's army retreated."

"Thou art young to bear such heavy news," she said, for a blue glimmer of lightning played across the doorway, and they could see each other.

There were others there, but none like her, for she was very tall and her head was white as snow, and her black eyes seemed on fire.

“Hulda,” said a man behind her, holding up a lantern, “let him come in and eat. He has ridden far.”

“Only from Irwin’s Hollow,” said Vine. “The messenger’s horse broke down there. So did he, for he was wounded. My horse is fresh.”

“Thou hast ridden well,” said the woman. “Thou art half way. Thou shalt not put thy foot upon the ground.—Jonas, get him the cold meat and the cider and the bread. Bring a nosebag of oats for his beast.”

“I would not stop for anything,” said Vine, but he told of his father and his mother and their neighbors at the Hollow.

It did him good to talk a little, but now the provisions for Turk and for himself were brought, and both of them expressed their hearty thanks.

Turk was cheerful, while his rider was not. There he sat, with a ham bone in one hand and a mug of cider in the other, the rain again pouring down upon him, and, now that he was among sympathizing friends, repeating what the messenger had told him when lying upon the ground, he seemed to be telling his black news to himself also, and he hardly could eat.

There, too, stood old Hulda, bareheaded, refusing to be led into the house.

“Boy,” said a man who stood near him, “she is an hundred years of age. She hath a testimony for the

man John Hancock, at the Congress, and she hath also one for thy good general."

"Thou that ridest with woeful tidings," she said in a loud, clear voice, "peace be unto thee and thine, and so do thou say to these two men when thou seest them. Say unto them that the Lord our God is with them. Bid them to be of good heart and of good courage, especially the man George Washington. He shall yet see the desire of his heart. Wilt thou tell them?"

"I'm only a boy," said Vine. "I can't see General Washington."


"Do as I bid thee," said Hulda. "Sit thou upon thy horse until thou shalt get to the ferry at Philadelphia. Stay thou not, save to do thy errand. Then ride until thou shalt stand before the leader of thy men to tell him this from Hulda of the hundred years. Bid him be of good cheer, for God, even our God, will surely give him success, and this people shall be free!"

Just then they were taking away the now empty nosebag, and Turk sprang forward.

"Speak not, but ride!" shouted Hulda, and on through the storm and the darkness dashed the boy who carried the story of the first lost battle of the Revolution.

CHAPTER II.

THE TORIES OF IRWIN HOLLOW.

“F there isn't that harum-scarum Scotch girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Irwin as she turned toward the house after carrying out a platter of victuals to Indian John under the tree.

His appetite did not seem to have been injured by anything the Six Nations red men had done to him, and his face was lighted up by what would have been a smile upon any face not quite so badly battle-marked.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "Young squaw run a heap. Heap jump! Young deer!"

"Oh, what can be the matter?" said Mrs. Irwin. "Has anything happened at the village? Jessie, where's Vine?"

Jessie had not waited for orders from her mother. She had heard the messenger from the army, and she had seen Vine clamber to Turk's back.

"I'll tell your mother," she had shouted to Vine, and she had sprang away when Turk did.

Everybody else for the moment was looking after

the horse and his rider, so that Jessie's absence was not noticed during a full half minute.

"Mrs. Cameron," suddenly demanded Squire Van Tine, "where's that girl of yours?"

"She gane," said she sharply. "What's that to you, ye Towry?"

"I'm going to make you pay for this!" he thundered back. "If it hadn't been for you, I could ha' stopped him. I could ha' taken the papers."

"You'd have taken half a yard o' cold steel with them," broke in the messenger, now on his feet again, "or an ounce o' lead. The time's coming for good men and true to deal with Tories and traitors. We'll make short work before long."

"Don't ye talk like that now," said a rough-looking man near the squire. "Now your rebel rabble is whipped by the King's troops, you can shut up for a while. We'll fix ye."

"I'm for the King!" said Squire Van Tine roundly. "I don't care who knows it. General Howe's army will sweep the rebels out of the Jerseys and into the Delaware. They'll take everything else, just as they took New York. They'll hang Congress, too."

He turned away as he spoke, for other men were as excited as he, and a growl of angry threats was beginning to be heard among the crowd.

The news was very depressing, nevertheless, and even ardent patriots were willing to wait a little, bitterly as they were feeling, and insulting as were others of their Tory neighbors besides Van Tine.

As for him, owning one of the best and largest farms along the creek south of the bridge, and one of the handsomest houses, he was a man of influence, such as riches give. It was true that a large part of his land came to him through his wife, Vine Irwin's aunt, but he had been a better manager than had her brother, Vine's father, and he considered himself the head of the family connection. That is, he was enough so to have pulled his nephew from Turk's back and to have prevented him from riding off with Washington's dispatches. He was even so important, in his own opinion, that he was greatly astonished when Mrs. Cameron forced her way through the crowd, demanding:

"What have ye to do wi' my girl, Rob Van Tine? She's gane as she was sent. Wull ye mind your ain affairs and let the Camerons alone? It's not for an unhoong Towry like yoursel' to call after a lassie that's neither kith nor kin to ye the day."

"Give it to him, Ma'am Cameron!" called out one of the men, and it was the blacksmith himself who now shouted to the entire gathering:

"Never mind, neighbors. It's time for the redcoats

to win something. It's the first victory they've had since they took Ticonderoga in the old war, and Ethan Allen's just taken that away from them."

It had been done by the Green Mountain Boys in the spring, but news traveled slowly in those days, and such news as that would keep fresh all summer. It was simply a fact, however, that the King's men, like Van Tine and his friends, had been greatly in need of some crumbs of comfort. They were not half sure yet how large a crumb this victory on Long Island might be, and they were disposed to walk away together and talk it over. So were all the Whig boys in the Hollow as fast as they heard the news, and there was not one of them that did not envy Vine Irwin. They all seemed to know his colt, too, and to have a high opinion of his capacity.

"He'll get there quick enough if he doesn't pitch Vi over his head," said one enthusiastic young patriot.

"He can't," said another. "Vi can ride anything."

"Besides," added a wise young horseman, "Vi didn't have any saddle or stirrups to bother him. All he had to do was to stick on and let the colt go. He won't throw him. He couldn't throw me unless there was a saddle."

They all could ride, and there seemed to be but one opinion, that the best hold for a boy on a horse was bare-

back, with no shoes to spoil his grip. They felt safe about Vine.

Jessie's errand had not been a walk at any part of it. Her dark, abundant hair flew back on the wind, and her rosy cheeks grew rosier as she sped onward; but she hardly drew a longer breath and she showed no sign of fatigue when she sprang lightly over the low fence at the corner of the Irwin yard and shouted her answer to Mrs. Irwin:

"Vi's gone to Philadelphia. He took General Washington's dispatches to Congress. He rode Turk," and then followed, without a break for any shortness of breathing, a full account of the tidings brought by the rider from the army.

It was bitter news for the wife of a soldier in the defeated force, but it was brought by the daughter of another, and Mrs. Irwin threw her arms around her, exclaiming:

"O Jessie! I know how your mother feels. Tell her I hope David Cameron is safe, and my Tom, too. But, oh, dear! Dear! How many were killed! How many are wounded and must die!"

"The rider from the army's gone to Walt Baker's, the blacksmith's. Walt says he can cure him and his horse, too."

"I'll go and cure him myself!" exclaimed Mrs.

Irwin. "I know more than Walt Baker does, except about horses, and I can tell him some things about a horse. Indian John, you lie there till I get back. There's a man been stuck with a bayonet. I'm going to see him."

"Ugh!" said the red man with strong approval. "Red-head medicine squaw go cure sojer. Pow-a-hitun-ka all good pretty soon. Eat a heap."

"You stay here, then, till I get back," said Mrs. Irwin. "Come, Jessie! I'll get some things, and we'll hurry right to Baker's. Perhaps he can tell me something more about Tom. Everybody in the Hollow will be wanting to know."

"I didn't wait for anything," said Jessie. "I supposed he'd told it all. What if he did know more about my father!"

Mrs. Irwin darted into the house and out again, bringing a bag which Indian John correctly described as "heap medicine bag"; but he may have erred in adding that it could "kill Seneca; kill Tory; kill Oneida; make redcoat sick."

He was not himself cured by any means, but he was an Indian warrior, and would have scorned the idea of lying in the grass on account of mere pain. No sooner were Jessie and Mrs. Irwin down the road beyond the turn than he was on his feet. He limped a little, but

he walked straight into the house and looked around him from room to room. There were three. Two were of the same size, front and rear, sitting room and kitchen. One, at the right on entering, was a bedroom, a wing room. Over all was no second story, but an unfinished garret, having small windows, front and rear, and ornamented with innumerable cobwebs along the ridge pole. He went up the ladder from the kitchen, and peered into the garret, remarking:

“Bed for boy. Old chief hide over there one day. No find him. Where gun? Irwin got him.”

That was the fact, testified to by the empty gun-hooks over the wide-mouthed fireplace in the kitchen. Over the smaller cavity for burning logs in the sitting room was another pair of hooks, also empty. These latter, however, were ornamental, for they were made of branching deer horns. That room was pretty well furnished, but the house contained no such useless extravagance as a carpet. It was simply the abode of a prosperous farmer of the days before modern luxuries crept in to breed discontent and to soften the American people.

Tom Irwin's gun had been a good one, but he had carried it with him when he marched away with the “minute men” of Irwin's Hollow to join the army before Boston. He had been at home this spring, just long

enough to plow and sow and put his house in order, and then he had enlisted again, leaving Vine and his mother to carry on the farm.

“Good!” said the Indian. “Irwin fight a heap. Boy want gun. Shoot Tory. Shoot Seneca. Mebbe shoot redcoat some day. Ride good horse. Old chief want horse, now leg gone.”

It was not quite gone, for he used it to walk out again after his critical survey was finished. He seemed to be considering the good qualities of that house with reference to its uses as a fort, and some words that he dropped sounded like a tradition that a fort it had been against Indian assailants in the earlier days of the west Jersey settlements.

It could never be so again, for the Indian frontier at its nearest point was a hundred and twenty miles away. It was nearer than that to New York, to be sure, and the Mohawk River settlers already had bloody warnings that war with England meant also war with the allied red scalpers of King George from the north and west.

Down at the house of Walt Baker, the blacksmith, there was just such a throng of excited inquirers as Mrs. Irwin had told Jessie there would be. Mrs. Cameron was there, almost angry because the laddie, as she called him, was not taken at once to “her ain house.”

"Ye'll coom there yet, laddie," she said. "My husband's in the Jersey line, if he's living. He's no the man to run."

"The Jersey men stood like trees in the battle on Long Island," responded the messenger. "I was near them part of the time, and then the cavalry had to protect the retreat. My name is Stuart, and I'm from Virginia. But the men from the Susquehanna and the Delaware and the Hudson stood shoulder to shoulder with the men from the Potomac. It was awful to see them go down."

"And the British won the day?" came mournfully from a voice in the crowd.

"They did," said Stuart, "but it cost them something. Their men went down as ours did."

"The first great battle since Boston, and we lost it," grumbled the smith. "But did Washington get away with his army?"

"I wouldn't be here if he hadn't," said Stuart, and his haggard face brightened with something like enthusiasm. "That very night, and all night long, we ferried our men and guns across the East River to the New York side. God gave us a fog to go in, and we didn't lose a man."

"Can Washington hold New York?"

"No," said Stuart. "The town itself is of no use

with a British fleet in the harbor. He'll fight 'em, though, every chance they give him. Oh, how I want to be there, but I must wait here till that boy gets back. I had to ride a long circuit myself, for the Tories are rising in the middle counties. I hope he is well mounted."

"That he is," exclaimed Mrs. Irwin. "I'm his mother. I'm glad he went. The colt he's on 'll outrun anything in the valley."

"Tories?" broke in the angry voice of the blacksmith. "There are swarms of them hereaway. They'll be worse to handle than the British and Hessians if we don't look out in time. We must do something."

"We'll shoot them a'!" came excitedly from Mrs. Cameron. "They'd bring the fire and the bluid o' the war to our ain homes."

"But if Washington's going to be defeated, I don't see what we can do," sounded dolefully behind her. "We can't stop 'em if he can't. They'll be coming here next, and we've got to look out what we do. I'm for Congress, but, if they're giving it up, I'll have to."

"Job Rounds!" burst from Mrs. Irwin. "Why, Elsie Cameron, did you hear him? I do believe he's a coward. He'd give up for the loss of one battle!"

"Washington won't," said Stuart, looking admir-

ingly at the flushed face of Vine's mother. "His men won't, either. The British haven't conquered America yet."

"They never will!" shouted Baker. "We can send more men from this very Hollow. I'm ready, but just now I'm mending guns and making horseshoes for dear life."

The excited talk went on, with endless questions and answers relating to the battle and the army and the stormy time that was coming to the Jersey people. All the while, however, there was even a more numerous gathering at Squire Van Tine's big house down the creek road.

Here, also, the talk was all one way, but there was no kind of enthusiasm in it such as burned at the Baker place. General Howe had gained a victory over Washington, and they were waiting to hear more about it. The size and kind of the victory might help them to decide quite a number of sober questions. The squire himself was saying so at the very moment when Job Rounds walked in.

"Job!" exclaimed more voices than one. "Let's know just how it was!"

That was what he came for, and his thin, freckled face lighted up with the pride he felt at telling all he knew and at being for the time a person of so very much

importance—the only spy the Tories had at Baker's! It was great.

Perhaps he and some of the others would have been less entirely satisfied with what they were doing and saying if they had paid more attention to two of Job's hearers who had not said a word.

One of these was the woman who so much resembled Vine Irwin, and whose face kindled so when they talked about his ride after the storm came and the thunder was rolling around the house.

The other was apparently only a little older than Vine, with hair curly like his and darker like her mother's, Mrs. Robert Van Tine, the sister of Tom Irwin in the army. Her face, like her mother's, had been sad at first, then indignant, but she helped herself all the way across the room on her crutches at last to whisper:

"Job Rounds, I don't care if it does rain. The dispatches 'll get there. Now, you see 'f they don't. I'd take 'em myself if I did have to go on crutches."

"Guess you wouldn't," said Job with a sarcastic grin. "I don't believe a lame girl can do much ag'in King George. You couldn't fight Howe's army."

"You wouldn't fight anything."

"Hush, Polly," interposed her mother. "Hear what your father's saying."

"The young viper!" roared the squire. "Nephew

of mine? Well! He won't ever come under my roof again. It's time to take sides. I'm for the King. His troops are coming, too. We'll be ready."

"O mother!" whispered Polly. "I'm so sorry! All those guns in the garret. They're to arm Tories with. Why, father didn't seem to be against Congress at first. He opposed the tea tax, and he opposed the other taxes."


"Polly," said her mother, "so did everybody, but when Congress raised troops and declared for independence, that was rebelling against the King himself. Your father wouldn't go so far as that. Now he's going the other way. Don't say a word, dear. It's making my heart ache."

A great many hearts were aching just then, and families were splitting all to pieces. Even the Franklin family divided. Glorious old Ben Franklin stood firmly by his country, but his son, the royalist Governor of New Jersey, stood as firmly by King George, and father and son never again spoke to each other.

Polly Van Tine leaned heavily upon her crutches while her father continued to speak about his patriot neighbors, and then she turned and left the room; but when she did so she walked better than usual, as if she were not quite so lame.

CHAPTER III.

THE MESSAGE TO CONGRESS.

“ALT! Halt or I fire!”

The young rider felt a quick jump at his heart, but it was a leap of sharp excitement, not of fear.

Turk sprang at once from the easy canter he had been taking and went forward with bound after bound.

The clouds had broken away after the storm, and the moon was shining brightly. The road was plain enough, for they were now in the old highway made for the stage-coaches. It was a turnpike, of course, but this place was not near any turnpike bar, nor was there any dwelling close at hand.

It was at the end of a long, level piece of road, and the summons to “halt” came from a dark place under trees which arched over from either side until their branches met. Any one under that shadow could see a person coming on the road, but could not himself be seen.

It was impossible for the British and the Tories to beset all the roads between New York and Philadelphia. Neither could the patriots guard them all at all hours. The most dangerous points for news carriers were near the ends of the route, and Vine had but an indistinct idea how near he might now be to the Philadelphia end of his journey. He knew, however, that he had put the miles behind him rapidly, for Turk had stubbornly resisted every attempt to pull him in. He had taken his own gait, and he was taking it now splendidly.

“Halt!” again rang out the angry summons. “In the King’s name, halt!”

“Liberty! Congress!” shouted Vi. “Hurrah!”

Bang! bang! bang! bang! in quick succession came the reports of both pistols and muskets. Well for Vine that there were no grists of buckshot to rattle upon him and Turk, but he heard the bullets hiss past his head, so near they came. He saw men spring out from among the trees. He caught the glitter of sabers in the moonlight as three mounted men drew their blades to intercept or follow him. They were not quick enough for the first, and their horses were not fast enough for the second.

Turk himself gave a neigh or a squeal that sounded like an angry laugh, as he dashed through the

musketeers on foot and past the swordsmen on horseback.

The footmen had all fired too high, and the horsemen wasted just time enough in pulling out weapons which ought to have been ready before. The truth was that not a man among them all had dreamed of being charged pellmell by a bareheaded boy. They had intended taking him prisoner, not immediately killing him. They wanted a live messenger to answer questions. They wanted the horse, too, perhaps. Therefore they had blazed away so recklessly, and now their prize was gone, while every musket was empty and every yard traveled by Vine's pursuers was to be matched with two yards put behind the flying heels of Turk.

The mud flew fast also, and two miles of the road went by in no time.

"Hurrah!" shouted Vine. "Hold up, Turk! We've beaten 'em!"

"Hi-en-em-my-hi!" neighed Turk triumphantly, for he knew he had won his race, and he was willing to hold up and prance a little.

"It can't be far to Philadelphia now," said Vi in reply to an inquiring whinny of Turk's, and he was right.

Not many minutes passed before he saw, between trees at his right, a distant glimmer of water.

“ The Delaware! ” he shouted. “ They said the road to the ferry ran along the river. But what if the Tories have captured the boat and the ferry? ”

He was only a raw recruit as yet, and he had small knowledge of army affairs, or he would have known how carefully such a thing as a ferry is protected.

The loud hail and the order to halt which greeted him at the end of his next half mile on the river road came from a sentry, in a green hunting shirt and a coon-skin cap, carrying a long rifle.

He was in the uniform of one of General Smallwood's battalions in the Maryland line, and when Vine answered, “ General Washington! Who are you? ” in a voice choke full of anxiety, he responded, with a hearty laugh:

“ That isn't exactly the countersign, but it'll do. Come along! What's up? ”

“ Dispatches for President Hancock,” and there Vine's voice had to wait a moment before he could go on and tell the rest of his news to the sentry and to a score of stalwart riflemen who rapidly came crowding around to hear.

Among them was an officer, who listened in silence until Vine's account reached the ambush on the road.

“ Stop there, dispatch bearer!” he said in a quiet but commanding tone. “ Orderly, take him across the river.

He must deliver his dispatches himself. See that no man touches them. There are traitors everywhere nowadays. Take a guard.—Lieutenant Lewis, your company! Mount! Catch that Tory gang on the road if you can. The troopers are British, by their swords and holsters. Take no prisoners, if you can help it. Shoot or cut down, and save us the trouble of hanging them. Forward!”

Even while he was speaking a score of Virginia cavalry, the best in the American army, were springing to their saddles. Vine shouted a further description of the place where he had been attacked, and Lewis and his men galloped swiftly away.

“We must keep that road clear at any cost,” remarked the officer.—“Now, Irwin.”

“Boat’s ready, Major Bowie,” reported a loud, eager voice from the water’s edge below them. “We’ll have him across in no time. River’s rising, too.”

Vine had noticed as he came along that the storm had been more severe the further he rode, but it was the tide and not the storm that was swelling the Delaware. He dismounted to lead Turk down the bank, and one of the riflemen said to him:

“We’ll take keer o’ your hoss, my boy.”

He put out a hand, but before he could reach the bridle Turk suddenly dashed ahead on his own account,

and he did not pause until he could stand in the middle of the ferryboat, and call back to Vine to hurry along.

"I guess he believes he's carrying the dispatches," said Vine. "He won't let anybody stop him."

"Prime good horse," said Major Bowie. "Glad they didn't stop him. But this is awful news. I'll cross with you. Tell all you know as we go."

Out over the glancing water the sturdy rowers pulled the great "longboat," as it was called, that served the ferry. There were many such boats at hand, now that troops and army baggage came so frequently to that crossing. Vine believed, however, that he had brought the heaviest load yet for that or any other boat in America. So did the brave soldier from Maryland who stood beside him, for he had to learn that no other young State had lost more heroes than had his own in the disastrous battle of Long Island.

The river seemed very wide to men in such haste to get over it, but the other side was reached in the gray of the morning.

"Now," said the major, "I stop here and go back to my post. The orderly will go on with you. Your horse must go into a stable here and feed and rest, for he must carry you back again. You must rest, too, and get your breakfast, and by that time they will have stirred up President Hancock."

“Good-by, sir,” replied Vine. “I don’t want to wait a minute.”

“Go right on, then,” said the major, stepping back on board the boat; but Turk came and put his head over his young master’s shoulder, as much as to say:

“We won’t stay here, Vine. We must go on together and deliver our dispatches.”

Vine had noticed one thing more. Hardly had the boat touched the shore before two men of the guard there sprang on horseback and galloped away at a low-voiced command from the major. His arrival was to be announced in advance, therefore, and men like Hancock were in bed at that hour.

“I’ll lead my horse,” said Vine. “I’d rather walk, and get the stiffness out. It’s been a pretty long ride.”

“Better walk! better walk!” growled his guide. “Awful news. We’ll beat ’em. We won’t give in. Wish I was there. Washington needs more men, that’s all. I was with him at the siege of Boston.”

“So was my father,” said Vine. “I don’t know yet whether he’s killed or not. I’ll be old enough in a year or two. But I can carry dispatches now.”

“True grit,” said the soldier. “Glad the Tories didn’t hit ye. Now, you take an old fellow’s advice. I served in the old Indian and French campaigns with

Washington, Braddock's, and all of 'em. Just do you be always ready to eat when you can, and get a sleep whenever you have a chance. Come right in here."

They paused before a house that was evidently a kind of army quarters, garrisonlike, and Turk at once whinnied loudly.

"I'll go into the stable with him," said Vine. "He won't let anybody but father or me mount him."

"Looks as if he had a temper," said the orderly. "Speedy?"

"Knows everything. Outrun any other horse. Gentle as a kitten," replied Vine. "But he's awful obstinate, and he can kick anything all to pieces. He can throw anybody—but me."

The soldier was feeling too badly over the news to appreciate Vine's account of the "gentleness" of Turk. As for him, he had taken the veteran's advice about being always ready for refreshments, and went on into a stall as if he belonged there. Vine curried him and rubbed him thoroughly, for there was much mud upon his usually glossy black coat.

"I must take good care of him," he said. "He and I must be ready. There, now! Soon as I get my papers."

He had not given a thought to his own personal appearance. Caring for Turk was somewhat like loading

a gun. He thought, too, about the men who had set out so quickly from the ferry.

If he had followed them he might have seen them pull in their horses before house after house to the number of over a dozen. At the first house, in answer to the horseman's hail, a head came to a second-story window.

"What is it?"

"Bearer of dispatches from the general of the army for President Hancock. Army defeated. New York captured by the British under Howe. Messenger on his way. Just crossed ferry."

"Bring him to my room in the south wing of Independence Hall. You and your comrade summon——" Several names followed. "Tell them to meet me there at once to hear the news."

It was John Hancock himself at the window, and away dashed the two cavalymen to arouse those who were to meet in council over the first defeat.

Vine was in the barracks house now, feeling almost angry that he could not go on at once. What could be so important as his dispatches? Who cared for boiled fish? Why did not those fellows come back to show him the way? As for Turk, he, too, was ready. His bridle hung back upon his neck, and Vine had not haltered him. A soldier brought him a bucket of water, but he drank

without speaking. He still had business on his hands, and he cared very little for anything else. There was nothing at all restful in the manner in which he stepped around his stall, nor in the quick back-and-forth movements of his ears. It was not a Tory stable, he felt sure of that, but he did not intend to let Vine get away from him.

Both to Vine and his horse there seemed to be an irritating waste of time while the orders of Hancock were fulfilling in front of those other residences, and while the startled patriots to whom the tidings went were hurriedly dressing themselves.

The storm had been severe in Philadelphia. Trees had fallen and houses had been unroofed and streets flooded. When at last Vine came out and looked around him, it occurred to him that the city looked as it ought to look with such news coming. It was not his first visit there, but his life had been spent mostly in the Hollow, and he was altogether a country boy. He was not thinking of himself just then, and nobody else was thinking of him, for even the guard on foot, now drawn up in front of the quarters, knew what he had brought, and their thoughts were with the army at New York.

"Ready?" asked a young officer in command of the guard.

"I'm ready," said Vine, but almost the same reply

was made by another person, for Turk had finished his breakfast, and he was here standing by the side of the other bearer of his dispatches from the commander in chief.

"Bring him along," said the officer. "Best horse I've seen for many a day."

"No tire in him," said Vine. "He can run all day."

"You are a light weight, too. Anyhow, we're short of horses just now. Glad he isn't used up."

"Not a bit of it," said Vine, patting Turk proudly. "He's as ready as I am. He went right through those Tories."

The men nodded to each other, for they all knew what pluck meant, and had heard of Turk's and Vine's charge on their enemies in the road.

On they stepped now with the two messengers, counting Turk for one, and it was not many minutes before they halted in front of the great brick building, enormous, it seemed to Vine, in which Congress held its meetings. Here the independence of America had been declared, and away up in the wooden cupola on top of it was the Liberty Bell which had rung out so joyously on that account the last Fourth of July.

It was more like a time for bells to toll now, but Vine left Turk and went on into the building with a

man who stood there waiting for him. It was wonderful for a mere country boy to be there on such an errand, and to be led through that long passageway into so large a room half full of great men.

Behind a table at the farther side of the room stood a fine-looking, well-dressed man, with ruffled shirt, dress sword, and stately manners, who beckoned with his hand as Vine entered, and then every man in the room was on his feet.

Forward stepped Vine silently, and handed his leather packet of bad news to President John Hancock.

“Who gave these to you?” he asked.

Vine’s heart was beating hard, and his color came and went, but he told of the wounded messenger, the exhausted horse, how he and his colt were there, and how he took the express rider’s place. He told of his gallop through the storm, how he was cared for at Hulda’s house, and the message she gave him to carry.

“You and your horse ate and drank there without your dismounting?” asked Hancock. “Then you rode on?”

Vine only nodded his “Yes,” and he next told of the Tory ambush he rode through, and the great men again glanced at each other.

“Repeat all the messenger told,” said a large, de-

terminated-looking man, who had drifted nearer until he stood close to Vine. "I want to hear it all."

"Let him tell his own story, Ben," said another; and Hancock added:

"Wait, Harrison. I will open the dispatches from the commander in chief. The boy may go out now."

A strong arm swept around Vine as stout Ben Harrison responded:

"He may go, Hancock. Did you hear? Alone? Through dark and storm and shot and steel? I tell you, and all those who are here, the boys of America are God's answer to any whine of ours over a defeat.—Go, boy! We shall call you back again. God bless the boys! There will be another army when this one is gone. Now let us hear the whole of it."

Vine stepped out silently enough, for his bare feet made no sound. He was to wait in the corridor during the discussion of Washington's dispatches, but his head was in a whirl, for his eyes and ears had been busy, and he was saying to himself:

"That man was John Adams. Over on that side that was Benjamin Franklin, that found out the lightning. The thin man was Thomas Jefferson. Mr. Reed, he took me in. That was Mr. Morris, the awfully rich man. I heard a lot of other names, too. Greatest men in the world, and I've seen 'em!"

It was worth the longest kind of ride, but Vine was not to know what was said by those patriots in their morning council. All he learned when Mr. Reed, the secretary, came out again, was that he and Turk were to have another errand in a short time.

"Some papers were ready," he said. "President Hancock is writing now. So are Adams and Franklin. I know Stuart, the messenger. He will be rested when you get there. If not, trust no other hand than your own, but ride on until you can give your parcel to the commander in chief himself."

Vine tingled all over, for now at last he was beginning to be aware how very rough and tangled he must be looking among those elegant men. It was one of the most stately of them, as elegant as Hancock himself; who now came out.

"Irwin," he said to Vine, "my name is Livingston. Come with me. It's only a few steps. I must give you an outfit."

"Mr. Livingston," began Vine, "I had to mount and ride just as I was."

"That's it," said Livingston. "That's the spirit that's to win this fight. Come with me."

Vine went, and Turk followed, but the black colt danced around a little uneasily when he discovered what was to be done with him. He knew all about saddles,

but he and Vine had done pretty well without one. He stood on his hind feet for a moment while Vine talked with him, and when he came down his fore feet went up for another moment. Then he stood still and whimpered rebelliously while Vine buckled on the brand new saddle, with holsters for pistols, which Mr. Livingston wisely decided a Government dispatch bearer ought to be provided with. The new bridle and halter were of the best, but Turk winced again when saddlebags were added. He stood tolerably still, nevertheless, while Vine went into the storehouse. When he came out he wore shoes and stockings—a rare thing for a Jersey farmer's boy. He also wore new buckskin knee breeches, a blue rifleman's shirt, a new straw hat, tarpaulined like a sailor's, and a new belt with a catch strap to hitch on a pouch.

“There are pistols and ammunition in the holsters,” said Livingston. “You won't need any sword. Of course, you can shoot?”

“I can hit a squirrel's head with a rifle,” replied Vine, for his spirits were rising. “But I don't want to carry any more.”

They went back now to the front of Independence Hall, and Vine next felt something like an electric shock, for he was more afraid of Ben Franklin than of any other man he had seen.

Very grave and dignified, but exceedingly kindly, was the great philosopher's manner toward the young messenger, but he spoke first to Livingston.

"Glad you didn't spoil him with spurs and a uniform," he said. "His horse's heels are worth more than the pistols."

"He can use weapons, if need be."

"Of course he can. Why, Livingston, he's a trooper already.—Irwin, you will need a little money."

He put out a hand as he spoke, and Vine took into his own the first gold pieces he had ever held. There were three of them, English guineas, and with them were several silver pieces, larger and smaller. He did not know that in the council that very morning Franklin had said:

"Gentlemen, what we need most is money. Money and arms. We can obtain them only from the French. I can not set out too soon to make a treaty with the King of France. This defeat on Long Island teaches us that we can not fight King George and his German mercenaries single-handed. We never counted upon his buying Hessians to fight us with. We must balance them with Frenchmen."

Not one of the others disputed him, but Vine was now wondering what on earth he was to do with such a positively awful pile of money. It was really a relief

to be told that it was not his at all, and that if he was not to go further than the Hollow he must hand it over to Stuart. It was expense money, not wages, but he could keep what might be left of it after getting through his errand.

"That is," remarked John Adams to a gentleman by the name of Jay, "if he does get through. They will shoot him or hang him if they catch him."

Vine heard that while he was buckling his dispatches in his belt pouch, and he remarked to Turk:

"But they won't catch us, will they?"

Turk stood up almost erect, and when he came down again Vine sprang upon his back nimbly enough in spite of the shoes and stockings.

"I'll take 'em off," he said to himself, "as soon as I'm across the ferry."

"All right. All ready. Go!" shouted Mr. Secretary Reed on the sidewalk, and Turk bounded away down the street, wishing that he had nothing to carry but Vine and some dispatches, without any saddle or holsters or saddlebags.

"Washington will get them," remarked Franklin to Hancock a few minutes later. "Safer than if a hundred troopers were lumbering along with them. I've faith in that boy and that horse."

CHAPTER IV.

THE WAR IN THE HOLLOW.

“**D**OLLY,” said Squire Van Tine to his lame daughter at a little after sunset of the day in which Vine Irwin talked with Hancock and Ben Franklin and the other great men, “I wish you felt well enough to go up to the village.”

“I haven’t felt so well in ever so long,” she exclaimed. “I’ll go in a minute. My rheumatism doesn’t hurt me at all. I’d like to go. Do you want me to see Aunt Irwin?”

“No, no,” he said quickly. “Not so far as the Irwin place. Only to Walter Baker’s. Find how that man Stuart is, and if they’ve heard from Vi. Get all the news you can. I don’t believe they tell Job Rounds everything, but they’d tell you.”

“Of course they would,” she replied, picking up her crutches. “But it’s too soon for Vine to be heard from. He’s to go all the way to Philadelphia and back.”

“Somebody may have met him,” vaguely suggested

her father. "Besides, you don't know that colt. He's a flyer."

Even a colt with wings could not have done it, but she replied:

"I'll come right back, father. It'll be dark, but you needn't come for me. I'll rest a while at Mrs. Baker's."

He was very willing that she should not feel too lame to go, and she only half knew why. It had been a busy day among the Tories of Irwin's Hollow, and there had been much coming and going from house to house. They had been in very good spirits, and they had talked to each other with many chuckles and with a number of sly remarks about the value of dispatches from the rebel Congress to Mr. George Washington, in command of the beaten rebel army. Job Rounds himself had said to a man whom he addressed as "lev-tenant," and who had a soldierly air:

"I s'pose General Howe'd give twenty pound for jest the papers Vi Irwin took to Congress."

"He would," said the lieutenant, "and he'd give more'n that for the answer they send back. It might be worth a hundred. You can't tell. 'Twould tell him what the rebels are going to do. Might make you rich."

"I'll do it," said Job Rounds. "We can fix him right here if he comes this road, and I reckon he will to see his mother."

After that they both talked with Squire Robert Van Tine, and one of his remarks was:

“I’ll take the young fool out o’ mischief, anyhow. We won’t hurt him.”

The “levtenant” had said something about “having the young traitor taken to New York and hung,” but Vine’s uncle had not heard it, and all he now asked of Polly was that she should go and get the news.

She was more than half right about her cousin Vine. His last words at the ferry from Major Bowie had been:

“Go slow, now. Don’t use up your nag. Steady, my boy. Don’t think of getting there before three days.”

Off went Vi, therefore, holding in Turk, and almost bursting with pride at having so tremendous a thing to do. He had had no sleep, but he did not mind that a particle. As for Turk, he had actually rested, after his own fashion, during the hours that had passed since he was ferried over the Delaware. He felt pretty fresh, and he was ready to say so.

Vine decided not to take his shoes off, although he had never before worn any except in winter. He was riding with stirrups now, and shoes were the correct thing. Moreover, he felt older, and was conscious of a growing idea that he was a trooper—all but wearing a saber.

"I'll get a sword somehow," he said to himself, "and a gun, too. I'll keep these holster flaps loose, so I can pull out a pistol quick if I need one. They're brand new. Real long barrels. Carry ever so far."

Of course they were flint locks, but nothing else was known in those days. Vine wished he had had them the night before, so he could have fired back at those Tories in the road when they fired at him. Turk's heels had been worth a stack of pistols, however.

On he rode, while Congress, in Philadelphia, heard the dispatches read to them by Mr. Reed, the secretary, and while they discussed very bravely and hopefully the situation of the patriot army and the cause of freedom.

Away up north, on Manhattan Island, above what was then the city of New York, there was sharp fighting that day between the British and Hessians on one side and the Continental army on the other.

There were no telegraph lines nor reporters to send out over the land any account of the fighting, and no history was ever made of most of it.

Noon came, and then the sun crept slowly down toward the western horizon, and all the afternoon seemed even quieter than usual in Irwin's Hollow.

Mrs. Irwin was not all the while alone in her tidy log house. Not only did a number of her neighbors

come to see her and to talk about Vine and his colt and the dangerous nature of the Philadelphia road, and the dreadful news from New York, but old Indian John came to have his hurts attended to, and he, too, was willing to hear as much as he could.

Then he went away elsewhere, and he must have gotten hold of Job Rounds, for Job reported to Squire Van Tine before sunset:

“Tell ye what, squire, all the Injins are for the King. If we want any real secret scoutin’ done, that there old vagabone Delaware John is the feller to send. He’d go across the mountains, ye know. All the Six Nations are goin’ to rise. He told me so.”

“I don’t want too much to do with any redskin,” snapped the squire. “They’re all pisen. You don’t know Indian John as well as I do. He’s an old skelper. Worst kind. He can outfight forty wildcats. He’s been fighting somebody this time.”

Neither to Job nor to anybody else but Mrs. Irwin had the old red man given a hint of how he came to be hurt. Job Rounds believed that he had tumbled down a ledge of rocks.

“Job come,” he had said. “Pow-a-hi-tun-ka push him over? Ugh! Job ’trike on he head. Old chief go down take he hair. Ugh! ’Calp him. Make he head feel good.”

Job shuddered and walked away just then, but it was only Indian John's ordinary way of displaying the kind of dry fun that belongs to his race. It is a little grim sometimes, but there is a great deal of it. It will come out even when they are making bonfires of their captured enemies.

The sun was behind the western mountains, and the shadows were deepening in the Hollow when Polly Van Tine pushed open the gate of the Baker place. She had paused several times on her way there, wincing with pain and half ready to give it up.

"Oh, how I wish I were well!" she had exclaimed. "Why can't I run like Jessie Cameron? Mother says I'll outgrow it. So does Aunt Hannah. I can't go any further. I must! I will! They shan't capture Vi and his dispatches. They shall not do any harm to Washington's army!"

She thought of the men from the Hollow who were with him as she went on her painful way, but none of them, not even her cousin Vine's father, dead or alive, seemed to have stirred up her patriotism and enthusiasm as had Vine and his swift colt. It was for them that she had fought her way to the blacksmith's place. Just now she was feeling hardly anything but envy and a kind of heartburning, for here, on the doorstep, was Jessie, as lithe as a young

panther, the perfect picture of bounding life and health.

"Polly," she exclaimed, "come in and see Mr. Stuart! He's splendid! He has been telling about the great battle. He was in all of it. But Mrs. Irwin says he must lie still."

"Vi hasn't gotten back?"

"Why, no," said Jessie. "But he is coming. He can ride. It's all he's good for."

"I'll come right in," said Polly. "Vi's a brave fellow, too, but I'd like to see a man that was really hurt in a battle."

Her manner of speaking of him was different from Jessie's, but then she was little over fourteen, and Polly was three years older. She was tall, too, but she had grown tall without growing strong, and she looked slender and drooping, and her face had pain lines on it and her eyes were wistful. That was the way they looked when they introduced her to Stuart, the young Virginia trooper, whom all the Whigs in the Hollow regarded as a kind of hero right out from among British musketry and bayonets and cannon and the sabers of Hessian cavalry.

Polly had very little to say, for she came there to hear; but Mrs. Irwin had also come in, and had brought with her some barks and herbs to be boiled for a medi-

cine tea for Stuart. She asked him questions, too, like a doctor, and Polly and Jessie went out to hear Walt Baker tell some neighbors one of the battle anecdotes. It was how a young artillery officer named Alexander Hamilton, with a single battery of guns, checked the whole British advance, and saved part of the American army. Hardly was it over before Polly whispered:

"I won't go in now, Jessie. Tell Aunt Hannah to come here. I must see her. It's about Vi and the Tories."

In a minute more Mrs. Irwin was with her in Mrs. Baker's bedroom.

"O Aunt Hannah!" exclaimed Polly. "It's dreadful! Father and those Tories! And I know there's an Englishman with them! They're going to take away any papers Vi brings with him. Mother would stop them, but she can't. You won't let them? Father says it'll keep Vi out of mischief, but then Washington's got to have those papers."

"Polly," said Mrs. Irwin excitedly, "you go home. Tell your father we haven't heard a word of Vine. Go straight home. Night air isn't good for you, anyhow. Sit down a minute first. Walt Baker's out somewhere. There isn't a man about the place."

Not a great while before that a black horse, apparently not tired to speak of, had been cantering easily



A dark shape glided out.

along up the main road to the village from the south. He carried a somewhat weary rider, but both of them seemed to be in pretty good spirits.

“Hurrah, Turk!” said the rider. “We’re almost there now.”

Just as a cheerful response began in the mouth of the quadruped he was interrupted by a dark shape that glided out of some bushes by the roadside, stood in front of him, and held up a hand with a gun in it, as if to bar the way.

“Hot!” he exclaimed. “Hot!”

If that was Indian John’s way of saying “Halt!” it did stop Turk; but Vine had been ready all day to draw a pistol, and he held one in his hand now as he responded:

“Drop that gun! What? Hullo, is that you, John? What’s the matter?”

“Vi shoot old chief? Ugh! Where he get a hoss-pistol? ’Top and wait. Go to Phil’delfy?”

“Yes, I did,” said Vine, “and I must see Stuart right away.”

“Ugh!” said John. “Ride into village. Give Tory new pistol, horse, saddle, papers. Uncle Bob heap fool. He and Tories wait in village for boy from Congress. Better talk with John.”

Vine did “talk with John,” and the situation was

evidently a little dark, but the old red man seemed to enjoy it tremendously. So after a little did Vine himself, for he had ridden all the way from the Quaker farmhouse, where he had once more talked with Hulda, but without the least adventure—nothing but riding along steadily and compelling Turk to keep within a fair road gait instead of racing himself tired. Here now was a new excitement, and something that looked like war.

His Indian friend led him onward only a short quarter of a mile to the bars of a cornfield, and there Vine dismounted.

“They won’t get Turk,” he said as they disappeared among the corn.

“No find hoss in woods,” said John. “Put him away back of barn. Feed him. Feed boy. Heap young brave. John like him. Vi kill Seneca some day.”

Field after field was traversed, then a piece of open woods that they both knew well, and then Turk was tethered behind some sumach bushes while his two friends went to bring him hay and oats and water. He did not altogether understand it nor like it, but he was well acquainted with the Delaware, and believed him to be on the same side of politics with himself and Vine. He had seen him in his own house, and even in his own barn. Turk felt that he himself ought to be there now,

but he was almost reconciled when John came limping back with the oats, while Vine carried the water bucket and a large wisp of hay.

"Now," said Vine, "I'll see mother, and then I'll go and see Stuart."

"No," said the Indian. "Tory watch house. Old squaw down at Baker place. Fool 'em all good, by and by. Go see 'Tuart. No 'top. No let Tory see him. Come!"

It was only another careful bit of scouting along behind trees and fences so as to reach the rear of the blacksmith's shop unseen. If this was war, it was also something like a game of hide and seek; but they did see several men coming and going along the road, and more than one of them carried a gun.

In Walter Baker's house all this time there had been nothing notable except the arrival of Polly Van Tine and the fact that Job Rounds was loafing at the gate, talking with those who went in or came out.

Mrs. Irwin was trying to keep cool, but the way she moved around and just now what she said to Polly showed what a fever she was in. As for Polly, she did as she was told, for she "sat down a minute," and no more.

Then she raised herself on her crutches and went straight into the other room where Stuart was.

"I'll see him," she said, "and then I'll go."

Her face flushed fiery red, and she trembled all over, for it suddenly flashed into her mind:

"Spy? Yes, they're making me a kind of spy on him and on Vi and on all the Whigs. I won't!" and she said aloud: "Mr. Stuart, I'm so sorry we were beaten. I'm Vi Irwin's cousin. I wish I were a man. I'd be with Washington."

The Virginia trooper was pretty sick, but he stood up at once and held out a hand, although almost the width of the room was between them. Mrs. Baker and Jessie Cameron heard him exclaim, very soft and low:

"I'm glad she isn't, then!"

But at that moment Mrs. Irwin pushed suddenly in, whispering loudly:

"Mr. Stuart, Vi is here! He is coming right in.—Come in, Vi! Come in! I'll shut 'em all out!"

In stalked the proud young dispatch bearer in his new rig, but his mother almost hugged the pride out of him before he could say a word to Stuart.

"Red-head medicine squaw shut mout'. Let he go," said a voice at her elbow. "Boy talk 'Tuart. Hurry up! Tory come take him. Squaw 'top!"

"Vine," said his mother, "tell it as fast as you can."

"Hurrah for you!" said Stuart. "You've made

the quickest kind of time. But I'm on the sick list. So is my horse."

"Turk and I are not," said Vine, and then he told his story. At the end of it he held out the money, but Stuart said:

"I'll have to take two of the guineas to pay my way. You keep the other and the silver. Can your horse carry you to New York? Or can you get another?"

"Turk can do it. I'll set right out."

"No, you won't," said Stuart. "You must sleep. No horse can keep it up at such a rate. Do as I tell you."

"Good!" interrupted Indian John. "Tie up Vi. Tie hoss. Keep 'em in house all night. Put 'em in bed."

Right behind, in the doorway, for he had pushed the door partly open, was the head of Job Rounds. He had heard all. He knew Vine had a packet of dispatches, and now he heard the Delaware say where Vine was to spend the night. He drew silently back and hurried away without any one seeing him.

"O Vi!" exclaimed Polly. "Don't you let them catch you. Be real careful, just as Mr. Stuart says. He's an old soldier. He knows."

Stuart laughed a little at that.

“Old soldier, Miss Polly?” he said. “Well, I’m twenty-one, if that’s old; but I’ve only been a soldier since Washington went to drive the British out of Boston. Long Island was my first battle.”

“You know more than he does,” she said. “But I must go home. Mrs. Irwin, I’ll have to tell father I’ve seen Vi. Oh, it is too bad!”

“Tell him! Tell him!” began Mrs. Irwin angrily. “Tell him Vine is serving his country.”

“Polly tell old Bob,” said Indian John gravely. “Say he come to house and see Vi. Know all ’bout Congress. Hear ’bout Phil’delphy. Polly tell him old Pow-a-hi-tun-ka heap good Indian. ’Calp Seneca for King Jaw.”

Polly did not pause to consider whether or not King George wished the scalps of his faithful Senecas to be taken by his one New Jersey red warrior. She put an arm around Vi’s neck and kissed him.

“Don’t get hurt,” she said. “I’m going to pray for you and for Washington all the time you are gone. Don’t let the Tories get the dispatches.”

“I won’t,” said Vine. “I do wish you’d get well.”

But his cousin turned and went out of the room instantly after saying:

“Good-by, Mr. Stuart.”

She was away out by the gate before she spoke again.

"I didn't want to hear any more," she exclaimed. "They didn't tell me all. I was afraid they would. I don't care now. Vi won't be harmed by anything I can carry home."

It evidently pained her to walk, but she was not now in any pain of mind about being a spy.

In the house Stuart very carefully gave Vine his instructions for the way. He was not to go by the usual road, but away around through the Morris County hills, that he might reach the Hudson River above the Passaic marshes just below the highlands. There he would find outposts of Washington's army, but until he reached them he would be in continual danger, for all the Tories were rising, and General Howe was sending out scouts and foraging parties who would make short work of a bearer of dispatches. Several men sent out by Washington before as well as after the defeat were never heard from. It even surprised Stuart, however, to know that Vine had carried to Hancock the first news of the battle of Long Island.

"I guess they caught the other fellows and shot 'em, or shut 'em up," he said. "Tell you what, Vi, you must be ready to run, but you may have to shoot. If you do, shoot quick and shoot straight. That's all."

Vine could not speak plainly, for he was eating. The old Indian had spoken about that as soon as he came into the house, and it had exactly suited Mrs. Irwin and Mrs. Baker.

“He mustn’t wait for a regular supper,” they said. “We must fill a wallet for him, too, but he can get plenty all along the road.”

“Eat now,” said John. “Get out o’ house. No talk any more.”

Vine had worked diligently, and now he was ready to slip through the backyard and the orchard as he had come in. The Delaware did not go with him, but walked out at the front gate and up the road, speaking to men and women, so that it was well known in the village that he was not with Vine Irwin. He did not even go to the Irwin place. Half an hour later, however, Mrs. Irwin got there, and she hurried right in. She did not light a candle at first, but went on into her bedroom and knelt down by the bed. It was a terrible thing for a woman whose husband was in the defeated army and might already be killed, for all she knew, to send off her only son also to ride through dangers of death or prison. She was there, in her log house home, all alone and in the dark, and even her country and the cause of liberty itself seemed to be all in the dark.

Everything that is worth anything costs something,

and the country that Vine and his father were fighting for, and his mother too, was worth a great deal.

It was almost as dark where Vine was just then as in his mother's own room. He was not alone, however, for there came a faint rustle in the grass near him, and a hatless head arose at his side.

"Tory come pretty soon. No find Vi. Heap mad. No 'calp 'em this time. Wait. 'Calp 'em by and by."

Other remarks indicated that he was beginning to consider a Tory as a kind of white Seneca, to be treated accordingly whenever found upon a warpath. They were crouching behind a high, zigzag rail fence, not a hundred yards from the house. Docks and mulleins and thistles grew thickly and high around them, and there were trees along the road.

"Why, John," said Vine at last, "the Delawares are not at war with the Six Nations."

"Vi keep he mout' shut," sharply responded the Indian. "What Pow-a-hi-tun-ka do with Delaware? Leni-Lenape Indian say he own Jersey. No! Say own Penn'vany. No! Ugh! All land of Susquehannock—John tribe. Own land 'fore Leni-Lenape. Six Nation come, kill all Susquehannock. Take land. Leni-Lenape take part land. John Susquehannock! All land mine! Kill Seneca. No kill Delaware. Shut up now! Tory come,"

Vine already knew a little about the Indians, but this was new. He was aware that his friend had a wigwam somewhere among the hills. There might be more like him. Vine said to himself that he would find out some day.

The word Leni-Lenape, the Indian name of the many Delaware clans, means "original people," but there had been another tribe, destroyed long ago by the Aquanuschiani, the Iroquois, or Six Nations, which had left behind it little more than the name of the river along the banks of which its hunting grounds and villages had been.

Just now one of its last representatives was peering through a fence at a straggling lot of footmen and horsemen that were passing along the road. One of the horsemen dismounted and hitched his animal to the fence across the way, and the others at once followed his example. They left no guard, for none was needed, and they all went on foot to the house.

"Uncle Bob Van Tine was with them," said Vine. "They wouldn't hurt mother, anyhow, but I wish I was there to see about it."

"Vi shut up!" grunted Indian John. "Old squaw talk hard at Bob. Come!"

Lame as he was, he got over the fence quickly, but Vine was already across the road examining the horses.

“Ugh!” said John, at the other end of the line.
“Heap redcoats! Ugh!”

“I know who the rest all belong to,” said Vine, but something was just then held out to him.


It was a remarkably fine cavalry carbine which John had unstrapped with its case of cartridges from the saddle bow of the foremost rider’s horse. From behind the same saddle he took a neatly rolled and strapped army blanket, remarking:

“Vi no sleep in house. Camp in woods. Shoot a heap. Come! Ugh!”

“Why, John!” exclaimed Vine. “That’s a British trooper’s horse. General Howe’s men have gotten away in here—right into our own Hollow! And the Tories are with ’em!”

CHAPTER V.

THE HICKORY BESOM.

“UNS up in your garret?”

“Yes, Jessie, and they think I don’t know they’re there. They brought ’em in the night nearly a week ago. Father didn’t want ’em there then, but he says he’s glad of it now.”

“Now Washington’s defeated? O Polly! it’s dreadful! But how fast you walk!”

“I don’t feel a bit lame,” said Polly. “I don’t care if it does hurt, either. I want to get there and hear what they’re going to do.”

Jessie had volunteered to see Vine’s lame cousin safely home to the Van Tine place, and the two girls seemed to be getting more wildly patriotic every step they took. They were not to carry home the first news of Vine’s arrival, however, for Job Rounds had reached the house before them. The squire and his Tory friends were already gathered out in the road when the girls arrived.

"Tell it as fast as you can, Polly," said her father. "Is Vi at Walt Baker's?"

"He was there," she said. "He was eating supper."

"Is he there now?" he asked.

"I don't believe he is," said Polly. "I don't know where he was going."

"His mother was there, and they said he was going home to bed," interrupted Jessie. "He carried the dispatches safe to Congress, and he's going to take some to Washington in spite of any one."

"Hold your tongue!" roared a rough-looking man near the squire. "We'll make it hot for your kind yet."

"Stop, Jessie!" said good Mrs. Van Tine at the gate. "Don't say any more."

"I'm not afraid of him," said Jessie, but the squire and the rest asked Polly more questions, and she told him exactly what she had seen and heard. It was not her fault if what she said was very much what the crafty old Susquehannock would have wished her to say. She quoted his own words.

"Jest as I told ye," said Job Rounds. "Ye didn't learn anything new from her. If we capter them papers, the reward belongs to me."

"They won't get him," whispered Jessie to Mrs. Van Tine. "He won't be there. I know he won't."

"Not now he knows they are coming," said the

squire's wife. "Oh, how I hope Vi will get through to General Washington!"

Nevertheless her husband and his friends, on foot or mounted, hurried away up the river road with a great deal of confidence that they were about to do something important. Job Rounds, in particular, was disposed to make cash calculations as he went, although he was troubled by an unpleasant idea that he might have to divide with some of these other men any money General Howe was to pay for the capture of Vine and his papers. The others were there, indeed, and they were to do the seizing, but, he argued, that was nothing. They had not been at Walt Baker's house watching Stuart and Vine, and listening and spying out the whole matter.

When the horsemen dismounted and hitched their horses at the roadside, and all went forward toward the Irwin house, Job marched boldly in front, leading the way, and just behind him were the squire and the "lev-tenant." The latter was a man who every now and then made remarks about the duty of loyal subjects of King George to shoot or hang every rebel they could catch. He had left his carbine slung at his saddle bow mainly because there was no shooting to be done right away.

"Heap good gun," had been remarked of it by Indian John when he and Vine were once more climbing the rail fence on the other side of the road.

"Just what I wanted," said Vine. "Oh, but won't that trooper be mad!"

"No shoot rebel," said John. "Say Tory 'told he gun. Tell King Jaw."

The old Susquehannock's idea of the distance between King George and his American army was evidently a little vague, but it was not a time for talking, and he and Vine were stealthily working their way across the fields toward the woods where they had left Turk.

In the meantime Job and the straggling band behind him reached the Irwin front yard. In a moment more they surrounded the house. Nobody could have come out of it without being caught. If Vine were really there, his own home had been turned into a trap for him.

No light showed at the windows; but that was nothing, for candles were scarce in Irwin's Hollow.

Job tried the door and found it unfastened, but right past him at that moment strode Squire Van Tine, and with him was the "levtenant."

"We'll go right in," said the squire, and then he added loudly: "Hannah! Hannah! Are you here? Where's Vi?"

It was just as Mrs. Irwin, startled by the noise at the door, sprang up from kneeling and hurried out of her bedroom.

"Vine?" she said. "Why, Robert, what do you want of Vine? He isn't here."

"Where is he, then?" roared the lieutenant furiously. "Where are those papers? You tell now! Where's the boy?"

"Easy, easy, lieutenant," interposed the squire. "We'll search the house."

Job Rounds had found a candle on the mantel, and was blowing the embers in the fireplace to light it.

"We'll find him," he said. "Mrs. Irwin, nobody's going to hurt you or Vi."

"Hang both of 'em!" growled the lieutenant.

"No, you won't," exclaimed Mrs. Irwin. "You can't catch my boy, and you daren't touch me. My husband's in the army, and I scorn a man like Robert Van Tine, that's against his own country and that's fighting his own flesh and blood. There'll be short work made of Tories some day, and of British and Hessians, too."

"Silence!" roared the lieutenant.

"Not another word!" said the squire loudly. "Where is Vi? Where did he go from Baker's?"

"Went into the woods," replied his mother proudly. "Went to carry his dispatches to General Washington. He'll do it, too! Search the house! And then, Robert

Van Tine, don't you ever come into it again. It isn't any house for a traitor to his country."

"I serve my King!" exclaimed the squire, but there were beads of perspiration on his face, and he was not feeling comfortable.

The candle had now been lighted, and the lieutenant himself went with Job and the rest to search the garret. Several men had already explored the barn, woodshed, cornerib, haystack, and the fence corners near the house. They all came back making angry, disappointed remarks, only to hear from the lieutenant worse things than they knew how to say.

Job knew now by a careless expression why that man was so furious.

"What!" said Job to himself. "Did he mean to capter Vi and the papers and then claim the reward instead of paying it to me? What would be the use of finding out things, I'd like to know, if you didn't get your pay for doing it?"

Job was already feeling badly on account of not finding Vine at home, and on account of a kick he got from the lieutenant, but now he felt worse, for he began to doubt if there was really any money to be made by serving the King. If that were true, he thought, a great many men would just as soon turn around and serve Congress.

The British trooper, for such he was, and not an officer but a sergeant, putting on higher rank than belonged to him, saw that he must give the matter up. Mrs. Irwin's Tory neighbors did not care much how freely she spoke about her son and her husband. They would not let anybody harm her, for as yet there had no harm been done to any of them, and there had been no kind of violence in Irwin's Hollow. He had to walk away. So did the squire, boiling over with indignation at the sharp things said to him in particular by his sister-in-law.

They all marched sulkily through the gate and along the road, but they did not get to the place where the horses were tied. That place was gone, or else it might be said that the horses were gone. The last performance of Indian John had been to unhitch them all and send them toward the village.

"The Whigs!" exclaimed Squire Van Tine.

"Rebels!" shouted the trooper.

"Every hoss has been stole," said Job Rounds, "and I don't believe the King'll pay for one of 'em."

Their owners at that moment were suddenly stirred to swift walking and even running, but it was late that night before the trooper, worn out and bitter-hearted, stood by his recovered nag and remarked gloomily:

"The rebels got the carbine, and they got the

blanket! I'm glad they didn't steal the saddle and bridle nor the horse. God save the King!"

He was a very devoted royalist, no doubt, and, as an Englishman, he had a right to be so. His Tory friends, however, even after they found and caught their horses here and there, could not help agreeing with Job Rounds that their first expedition had not amounted to anything worth while.

Poor Mrs. Irwin!

She held up splendidly so long as the enemy were in the house or near it, but the moment the squire and the rest were gone she fairly broke down. She was not in the dark now, for the candle had been left burning, but it seemed to her that she was lonelier than ever with her own brother-in-law turned against her and some of her old neighbors, that she had known from childhood, besetting her house to capture her brave boy. She went back to the kitchen door and opened it and stared out toward the woods.

"Ugh!"

It was a very low sound from behind the wellhouse near her, but it made her step at once to the well, as if she meant to draw a bucket of water.

"Ugh! Indian John no down well. All Tory gone? Bob Van Tine gone?"

"All gone," she said. "Where's Vine?"

"Boy in wood," said John. "Better not come. Old chief come in. Squaw go. Leave door open. Tory watch."

She made believe draw the water and then hurried in, only to find that the cautious red man was right, for there was Job Rounds coming through from the front doorway.

"I only came to say," he began, but Mrs. Irwin's temper had been too sorely tried that evening, and she sprang to a corner for her broom.

It was not a soft wisp of a "broom-corn" broom, but what the old time people called a "besom," made of shaved hickory splints, now worn a little stubby. It was a tremendous broom to sweep a spy out of a house with, and Job's explanation was cut short by the harsh rasp of that besom right across his face.

"Yoh!" he yelled. "Yow!" for it came again right and left, and the sharp-edged splints clipped keenly against his projecting red ears.

"O Ma'am Irwin! De-on't! I only wanted to see Vi, if he was here, and tell him the Tories are after him. Don't! I'd ha' give him warnin'!"

"Get out!" she shouted, bringing the besom down upon his head with all her might. "You brought 'em here. I heard you say you did. They offered a reward

for Vine. You'd sell your soul, if you have one, and your country, too. Get out! Traitor! Spy!"

He was dodging toward the door as best he could when a light, swift form went by her.

"Stand back, mother! I'm here."

Whack! whack! whack! not a mere besom now, but a stout white-oak cart stake that Vine had caught up when he heard Job's first outcry. He, too, had been behind the well, but his pistols were in their holsters in the woods, and his new carbine lay by them. He had crept home unarmed for a last word with his mother, following his Indian friend against pretty positive orders.

Down tumbled Job, and the cart stake flew like a very active flail.

"Top!" said the Susquehannock. "Job heap fool. No kill him. Boy got home."

Job rose to his feet, rubbing himself, and the first words he said were:

"Indian John, you didn't find him. I did. I'll go and tell Squire Van Tine. They'll come right back. Oh, how it hurts! Take away his club!"

"Job take away club. Old chief go tell Bob Van Tine. Tell redcoat levtenant. Tell Tory. Job 'tay here."

"No, I won't," shouted Job, darting out through

the door. "I'll tell them myself. You hold him till they come. Oh, I'm a'most murdered!"

"Boy pound Job good!" said John as the spy hurried down the road. "'Calp him some day. Talk now. Then come sleep in woods. Medicine squaw talk with young brave."

There was genuine delicacy in the way the old warrior at once walked out of the house, leaving Mrs. Irwin to say good-by to Vi and send messages to his father in the army without anybody to see or hear. She felt a great deal better than if he had been compelled to go away without speaking to her, and he had been ready to run any risk rather than that should happen. Still, he could not stay long, and he shortly started to obey a shrill whistle that sounded from the neighborhood of the barn. He had barred the front door and the windows, and was speaking to his mother when a loud knock sounded through the house, and a well-known voice inquired:

"Mrs. Irwin, is Vi all right? He mustn't stay. I met Job Rounds, and he took me for a Tory. He can't but just walk. Told me all about it."

"Mr. Baker, I'll sleep so far in the woods that nobody can find me," shouted back Vine.

"They're all out hunting their horses," replied the blacksmith. "That was a sharp dodge of yours. Hur-

rah for the Continental Congress! Take a good rest and ride through to New York. We'll take good care of your mother."

That was what Vine meant to do, and what he wanted to have them do. He went to the forest cover where Indian John waited for him a much more contented young patriot. Not many minutes later he heard Turk's loud whinny welcoming him and asking where he had been out so late. Then he spread his new British army blanket on the grass, for now he had two, put his carbine down by it, made a pillow of his saddle bags and holsters, and went to sleep, about as tired a boy as there was in west Jersey.

Pow-a-hi-tun-ka himself lay down for a while, but he had done nothing to make him tired, and at the end of about three hours he was up again, without, however, disturbing his young friend. Vine was still taking his first "bivouac" as a young unenlisted soldier of the Continental army when all the sleepers in Robert Van Tine's house were startled by a loud bang at their door.

"Hullo! What is it?" quickly demanded the squire from an upper window.

"Indian John come," was soberly answered from below. "Heap lame. All the way from Irwin place."

"Where's Vi?" asked the squire. "Job Rounds

was just here to say he was there. I didn't mean to get up again to-night for anything. Lost my horse."

"Old chief find hoss—morrow—down creek. Vi ride away in morning. Get breakfast. No 'tay then. Bob Van Tine come catch him for King Jaw."

"Take his papers away to-night," said the squire angrily. "Do it yourself."

"Old chief no want 'em," said John. "Bad medicine. Bob take 'em. Vi say old King Jaw want 'em a heap."

He persisted in refusing to have anything to do with the dispatches, but he assured the dissatisfied squire as he turned to limp away:

"King Jaw take Bob 'calp for letting Vi ride away with paper."

There was not a sign of double dealing about him, but when he got through arousing Tories at their homes that night he ought to have been as tired as Vine. Some of them shouted all sorts of things at him from their windows, some got up and dressed, and more did not, but he really left behind him an impression that he was prepared to serve "King Jaw," even if that monarch should order him to scalp useless Tories as well as evil-minded Senecas.

"'Tir 'em up," he said at last. "Make 'em feel good. Now go 'tir up Vi. Eat a heap."

It was just in the gray dawn when Vi was stirred up, but it was not by the old Indian. Turk may have been insecurely fastened the night before, for here he was, leaning over his partner in the dispatch-carrying business, and pretty sharply asking of him why he did not get up and attend to oats and hay and things.

“Hey?” exclaimed Vine, springing to his feet; but he said no more at once, for he smelt something.

There was the Susquehannock, the last of his tribe in New Jersey, or pretty nearly so, crouching over a fire he had kindled. The smoke of it was beginning to float around through the woods, but that was not all. Vine drew an exceedingly long breath and exclaimed:

“Fish! Where did he get them?”

In the creek, of course. It had been the best time of day for fishing when Indian John returned from stirring up the loyal servants of “King Jaw.”

“Vi all right?” he asked. “Hoss ready pretty soon. Ride all day.”

If Vine felt any effects of his trip to Philadelphia he did not say so. He did not care, either, for he was already beginning to warm up with feverish excitement concerning what might be before him. He was to ride on, through all sorts of things, right into the camp of the largest army ever yet gathered in America, that was also face to face with the largest army ever sent over

from Europe. He had heard, too, that in New York harbor was one of the greatest fleets ever commanded by an English admiral, and he hoped he might have a chance to see ships of war as well as regiments and forts and cannon.

"Come," said Indian John as soon as he and Vine had finished breakfast. "Old chief talk. Then put on saddle."

Vine had grown up on a farm, and he believed that he knew a great deal about horses and saddles until that morning. Before he satisfied his Indian friend, however, he found that he had some things to learn. The fact was that he knew more about horses without saddles, and he had something like a trial when he came to mount with shoes on.

"I'll climb up," he said. "Then you can hand me the carbine."

"Ugh!" said the Susquehannock. "No! Vi take gun. Now, get on. Who give him gun when he all alone? Make him know how now!"

He made Vine stand by Turk's shoulder with the reins and carbine in his left hand, the gun almost on the other side, muzzle down.

"Now!" he said. "Vi jump! Tory after him! Foot in 'tirror! Ugh!"

Vine sprang into the saddle as if he were a cavalry-

man, and he at once had more respect for Indian John. A few minutes later he learned another thing, for John went into some bushes on foot and came back as a horse-man. To be sure, it was a short-legged, queer-looking beast that he rode, but then it accounted for his return from the New York border with that hurt on his leg.

"Seneca pony," he said. "Run a heap. Vi come along now. Find road."

If Vine had been left to himself the road he would have found was the one along the creek, up the valley, but Pow-a-hi-tun-ka led him through the woods mile after mile. All the way he seemed to be going up, up, up, and at last he and his young friend struck a narrow, rugged path in a kind of ravine that was steeper than a house roof.

"I'll get down and lead Turk over," said Vine.

"No!" replied John with emphasis. "Vi ride where Turk climb. Got to know how. 'Tick on tight."

His own pony went up as if he had been part horse, part cat, and Turk followed, with Vine on his back, unflinchingly.

They came out on the summit of a high ridge, and the Indian pointed back and remarked:

"Nippitink Creek down valley. Vi ride round him. Old chief know he own land. Susquehannock path.

Leni-Lenape path. Six Nation no come here. Jersey men go other road. Now, come!"

It was still a rough and difficult bit of riding down the mountain side, and Vine was a long way out of Irwin's Hollow when he again saw before him fields and farms. It was the middle of the forenoon when, just in the edge of a piece of dense woods, above a reach of rolling country, John suddenly exclaimed:

"Hot! Vi listen. Hear? Ugh!"

Vine listened anxiously, for at no great distance beyond him sounded the clear, mellow notes of a bugle.

"Hot a little more!" said John.

Vine "halted," with Turk pricking his ears back and forth and pawing the ground. Then he saw, cantering along a road in the lower ground beyond him, a party of horsemen in red uniforms.

"Vi see?" said John. "Howe men. Shoot Vi dead and take away paper. Take Turk. Then they tell Howe. Let 'em go by. Road all clear then."

Vine understood perfectly. The crafty old warrior had led him far away from any path that would be guarded by the Tories of Irwin's Hollow, and he was safe from Squire Van Tine and the "levtenant." Here, however, was the unexpected proof that General Howe's foraging and scouting parties were scouring all middle New Jersey. He could let that squad of British cavalry

ride past him, but who should tell him when he might meet another or a whole regiment or an army?

"By," said the Susquehannock. "Old chief go home. See Bob. Tell him Vi got away. Tell medicine squaw Vi all right. Tell her he go see army."

"Good-by," said the young dispatch bearer, but Turk was hard to hold now he had heard the cavalry bugle. In another moment he went over a ragged bit of fence nearest the woods and galloped away across a broad, weedy meadow.

"Whoop!" exclaimed Vine. "The bars at the road are down! I'll shoot at any fellow in a red uniform. I'm ready. Now, Turk, you may go. We are right in among 'em."

He was in a main road that was in very good condition, and he was galloping northward with light horse from the British army only a quarter of a mile away.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOLLOW BOYS AND GIRLS.



HE young dispatch bearer had parted from his Indian guide. He knew in which direction to go, and that was about all. He had but a vague idea of how far he had traveled across the mountains since sunrise. He was in the road now, and the cavalry squad was riding in the other direction. He was thinking, half triumphantly, "I guess I've left 'em," when the bugle rang out again sharply, and a loud shout announced that Vine's rapid dash across the field had been seen by his enemies.

Perhaps they might not even then have thought him worthy of especial attention if it had not been that he looked somewhat like a trooper and carried a carbine, and that he and Turk seemed to be in such a tremendous hurry.

"Forward, two!" shouted the British officer in command. "Take him or cut him down!"

That meant saber work, and they were hardly near enough. They would, indeed, have needed long swords

that grew longer, for Turk was not the horse to be caught up with in such a race as that. The two cavalrymen in red uniforms who were after him and his comrade were pretty well mounted, no doubt, but each of them was much heavier than Vine, and weight counts for a great deal in a long race.

"They'll give it up pretty soon," said Vine to himself, trying to pull Turk in rather than hasten him. "Let 'em run. They can't catch us."

That grew plainly evident, but the two troopers galloped steadily on, as if they intended to follow all day, although the distance between them and Vine increased.

"What can it mean?" he began to think. "Why don't they give up? They know now that Turk can beat them."

A new thought came flashing into his mind, and it made his heart jump.

"There are more where these came from! What if I'm riding straight toward all the rest of 'em? I may be caught by a whole company. That's what Indian John told me to look out for. Turk! The woods! You and I must play Indian!"

The road was by no means straight, and just now it was winding among the tall trees of a "first-growth" forest, that had very little underbrush.

“That’s a wagon track!” exclaimed Vine. “I’ll try it. I know John would say so.”

Into it he dashed, and in an instant more he was completely hidden from his pursuers when they came around the turn of the road. He had dodged them for the time being, but he believed they would soon find it out.

“Then they’ll come back after me,” he said. “I won’t stay in any kind of track.”

Turk was perfectly satisfied to wheel off among the trees, but he neighed inquiringly, and Vine responded:

“You keep your mouth shut. You might almost as well sound a bugle to tell ’em where we are.”

Turk had no more to say, but that stretch of forest only lasted him about half a mile. Then he came to a high rail fence, with a cornfield on the other side.

“Got to go on,” said Vine. “I’ll let down a length of fence.”

He had to dismount to do that, and when he and Turk went through the gap into the field the corn hid them so well that Vine decided not to mount right away. He led Turk along between the rows for a considerable distance.

“Biggest kind of field,” he said to himself. “I s’pose the British ’d steal all the corn they could lay

their hands on. Hullo! What's that? Fighting? I want to see what it means."

A first sharp rattle of gun reports was followed every few seconds by shot after shot at some place just out of sight beyond the corn. Turk almost trod on his comrade's heels in his own haste to find out what it meant.

"Skirmish," said Vine. "Some of our fellows out there. I wish I could help 'em!"

Nearer, sharper sounded the firing as he pushed along, and the instant he reached the end of that row of corn he understood it well enough. He was near a corner of the field by the road. It may have been the road he had left, but in it were a score of mounted men, part in red uniforms and part in blue.

"British and Hessians!" said Vine.

They were blazing away with pistols and carbines, but so were other marksmen whom Vine could not see. The sound of their firing came from near a house just beyond on the other side of the road. Vine heard a hoarse voice shouting:

"Sabers! Charge! Cut down every man! Women, too! They're shooting us. Down with 'em!"

Vine's carbine was in his hand, and up it came, he hardly knew how. He saw one of the horsemen reel and fall from his horse just before he pulled his trigger.

Just after his carbine cracked he saw the officer himself who gave that command to charge pitch forward from his saddle, dropping his saber.

“Halt!” shouted another trooper, the next in command. “Wheel! They have re-enforcements. We shall be cut off.”

Vine heard no more, for he was getting out his pistols to try them, and it was their two reports following that of his carbine that suggested the idea of three new marksmen, or perhaps many more instead of one, arriving by way of the cornfield.

Away galloped the cavalry, taking with them the officer, dead or wounded, and the coast was clear for Vine to come out, after lifting down some bars.

“Every man load up!” shouted a burly farmer at the houseyard gate. “I say, you! Hurrah! You got in just in time. We gave it to ’em. They murdered three of the neighbors last night, and burned a house. The Hessian yagers did it. We’ve killed six of ’em. Who are ye?”

“Bound north,” said Vine, as Stuart had told him. “Special orders. You must see to it that I get through without delay.”

“We will!” said the farmer. “I know what you mean. Just you ride right along. Keep to the west’ard for about a dozen miles ’fore you turn north again.”

Vine told about the cavalry farther down the road, but his friend replied:

“We’ll take care of ’em. Our boys are rising fast since we heard from the defeat on Long Island. There isn’t any give up in this neighborhood. The Hessians ’ll murder us all if we do.”

He was too nearly right. The really terrible part of the war had only just begun. Vine noticed, moreover, among the little crowd that came out of the house and from behind the fences with guns in their hands several fellows hardly older than himself. Every boy among them, moreover, seemed to envy him as soon as they saw his outfit and learned that his errand would carry him all the way to Washington’s army.

They made him stop and eat, of course, and Turk was cared for, but every minute was counted. Then Vine showed the other boys that he could get into the saddle unassisted, carbine and all. He would not let one of them help him.

“Good-by!” he shouted. “Hurrah for the Continental Congress!”

“Hurrah for Washington!” shouted one of the women. “I wish I could see him!”

There were several women there, and Vine had talked with them and with the men and the boys, but as he rode away he had to turn and look back to make sure

it was real. It was his first battle, and although it was a very small one, he had marched into it so unexpectedly that now it was over it seemed like a dream.

"I've loaded the carbine and the pistols," he said. "I couldn't have done anything with a sword if I'd ha' had one. Don't I wish I could tell mother about it! And Jessie! And Indian John! Yes, and I'd like to tell Uncle Bob, and let him know what his Hessians are doing and how the people are going to give it to 'em. It was kind of awful, though, to see them lying there in the road all bloody. War's awful!"

If he was eager to report his sudden skirmish with the "yagers" to the old Susquehannock, Indian John was just then making a very peculiar report of his own. He had already told Mrs. Irwin all he knew of Vine's morning ride over the ridge and through the woods. He said nothing about the bugle except to himself.

"Make medicine squaw feel bad," he remarked considerably. "Redcoat no hurt Vi!"

That had been his opinion of the cavalry music, and now, standing in front of the blacksmith's shop, he was telling Squire Van Tine his opinion of a man who pretended to serve King Jaw, and yet had failed to capture Vine Irwin with all those papers.

"Ole King want 'em heap," he said. "Come 'calp Bob."

"Why didn't you take 'em? I told you to," roared the squire, very red in the face.

"Vi got 'em," said John stupidly. "Old chief go sleep in woods. Vi go away. Take paper with him. All Bob fault. John tell King Jaw when he come."

His expression of eye, and it might also be said of cheek, was absolutely wooden, but he had managed to arouse a pretty strong feeling among the other Tories that, somehow or other, Robert Van Tine was responsible for their failure to take those dispatches and send them to General Howe. Why did he not go after them in the night more promptly when the Indian came to stir him up? He had stirred them all up, to be sure, but for all that they were entirely willing to join him in laying the blame on somebody else.

Smoke had risen from the chimney of the Irwin log house at a very early hour that morning, for Mrs. Irwin's breakfast had been eaten at about the same time with Vine's own.

She was just sitting down, alone and lonely, when it sounded as if a question came dancing all the way from the front door to the kitchen:

"Mrs. Irwin, did Vi get away from them?"

It was a pretty good breakfast. There was no tea on the table. The Whigs did not drink tea, for fear it might have paid the tea tax to King George. There was

only coarse, brown sugar, such as could be obtained in the West Indies and smuggled in by way of Delaware Bay by the swift schooners of the Baltimore sailors. There was no real coffee, but Mrs. Irwin had made a fair imitation out of burnt rye and dried dandelion roots. The rest of the supply on the table was eggs and bacon, with corn cakes, and the whole of it, more than one person required, meant that she had been up before daylight, with a wish, rather than a hope, that Vine himself, if not Indian John with him, might come slyly creeping in past the barn and the hencoop to take a hearty meal before going away for good.

They had not come, but here was Jessie Cameron, half wild with excitement, and it really did Mrs. Irwin good to turn from turning a cake on a griddle and say:

“Why, no, Jessie. They haven’t been here this morning. I don’t know where Vine is. The Tories won’t, either. Have you had your breakfast?”

“Of course I haven’t. Do you s’pose I’d wait? Or that mother’d let me? Won’t you tell me everything, so I can tell her?”

“Sit right down, child,” said Mrs. Irwin, putting that hot cake on a plate for Jessie. “I’m so glad you came. Indian John and Vine were here last night. I know they’re gone, but we had such a time.” Out came the whole story of how the Tories had searched

the house; but it was hardly told before there, in the front-room doorway, towered the tall form of Walt Baker, the blacksmith, and behind him strode in nearly a dozen of the Hollow farmers, every man carrying a gun.

"Where's Vi?" asked Baker.

"Gone to General Washington's army," responded Mrs. Irwin, as proud as a peacock. "He was here after Bob Van Tine was. They didn't get anywhere near him. He slept in the woods."

"God bless him!" exclaimed a deep voice behind Walt. It was the minister of the Hollow church. "God be with him all the way, and with our country and with our general and his army!"

"Amen!" almost shouted the "minute men" in the other room; but the next word came from Jessie:

"O Mr. Baker! are our folks going to let the Tories have their own way?"

"Not in this valley," said the blacksmith. "They're going too far. Neighbors are neighbors, but I'm going to warn Bob Van Tine that if he tries this sort of thing on again——"

"I don't want him hurt," said Mrs. Irwin. "Not for his wife's sake. I do hope Washington 'll win a victory, and then they'll all turn to our side."

"That isn't the right stuff," said Baker. "What we

want is men that are on our side win or lose, like Vi's father and Dave Cameron. Come along, boys! Hurrah for Vi Irwin!"

"And his hoss!" added one of the men.

Out they all went, for they were much too excited to linger in one place. Right past them in a minute or so ran Jessie, on her way home with her thrilling story of the doings at the Irwin house, and of how Vine had escaped the searchers. Just in the edge of the village, near her own home, she met Job Rounds.

"You didn't catch Vine, did you?" she said as sarcastically as she knew how. "He got away from all of you. But, oh, wasn't you mean! You'd sell him!"

"I—I—didn't go to capter him," stuttered Job, for he was aware that the Whigs were angry, and he did not care to be set down as too openly against them. "I—I—only wanted to warn him."

"So you took 'em all with you when you went," said Jessie; but she did not pause for any more talk while she had so much to carry to her mother.

When she reached her own gate she did not need to say anything right away. Squire Robert Van Tine was there, and so was Mrs. Elsie Cameron. He had paused in passing to ask if she had heard of Vine or Indian John or any of the lost horses, and Jessie kept

still while he spoke of them, for her mother did not quite understand what he meant.

“Horses?” she said. “Did ye loss one?”

“O mother!” shouted Jessie. “I know. Mrs. Irwin told me. I don’t know anything of Indian John, but Vine’s gone. The squire——” and she told it all, still leaving wide room for doubt if the old Indian had not after all been working hard for “King Jaw.”

Vine’s escape was good news, but Mrs. Cameron’s face grew red and her voice was harsh and shrill when she said:

“Robert Van Tine, walk on! Dinna ye linger before me door. There’ll be bluid on your head sune. You’re no better than a redcoat or a boughten Hessian. Go on, ye loon! They’ll be lightin’ your ain house and haystacks yet. Me ain grandfather was ane o’ Oliver Cromwell’s men, and yours was a Hollander. What ha’ you or I to do wi’ a British king? Or wi’ onything but the gude land we live in? Ye’re a traitor! Ye Tory!”

The squire was furious, but he was not a good talker, and he was no match for Mrs. Cameron. He was utterly astonished, however, for he had believed himself about the greatest man in Irwin’s Hollow, and now all sorts of people, even girls like Jessie, were refusing to be influenced by him or to take the same side that he did.

He turned away and walked toward the blacksmith shop and the bridge, but he might have learned more about the very young people of the valley if he had been either at his own home or at Mrs. Irwin's just then.

The Van Tine house was large, with a high-peaked roof over the main part. Under that steep-sided cover there was, of course, a great deal of garret. There were windows only at the ends, and these were small, with tiny "six-by-eight" panes of dull green glass. Over these the spiders had woven curtains, now embroidered with dust and dead fly wings, so that little enough of light came through. There was just about enough that morning to make a kind of gloomy glimmer among the polished barrels of a lot of muskets that lay on the floor.

"Sixty-seven," said Polly Van Tine. "I heard them say that was enough for the men they had already, but more would be sent from New York. So there are to be more armed Tories. Those boxes are full of cartridges and those there have swords in them for cavalry. What does father mean? I know he used to talk for Congress. But, oh, how I wish the Whigs had these guns! I don't want them used to shoot our men."

They were brand new weapons, all of the same size and kind, with bayonets, and were very different from the fowling pieces, big and little, of all sorts, that hung upon the gun hooks in the houses of the New Jersey

farmers. If there was to be a company of Tories formed in that neighborhood, it was to be better armed than the patriots who were to be fought by it.

Polly looked at the muskets more and more sorrowfully for a number of minutes, and then she made her slow and painful way downstairs. She seemed to be very lame that morning.

The crowd that was now gathering at the Irwin place was neither lame nor silent. It was a very active and very noisy crowd. It consisted of an uncertain number of boys of Vine's own age and younger away down to little Sam Baker's size, and he wasn't ten yet.

"Mrs. Irwin," he piped as he ran in ahead of the rest, "we've come to do his chores for him while he's gone to the army."

"What, Sammy?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," said a larger boy. "I can milk the cows myself and feed the horses."

"I've done it all for to-day," she said. "But it's a great deal for one woman to do, I declare!"

She hardly knew what to say, for more boys were coming, and so were some of their sisters. It was, in fact, a kind of revolutionary "helping bee," and it swarmed all over the place.


"I say, boys," said Sammy, "it's an awful big field o' potatoes. Let's hoe 'em all 'fore Vi gits back,"

“ We can husk some corn, too, and cut a lot of it. Shock it up.”

Vine’s “ chores ” were likely to be done to a tremendous extent, including the chopping and splitting of a great deal of wood, for there were logs in abundance back by the barn. Some of the young workers had near relatives in the army. Others said, every now and then, that they meant to be there themselves some day. But the most curious feature of it all was the fact that several of the fellows who hoed so hard in the potato field that day belonged to families whose grown-up men and women were understood to belong to the Tory side of the great conflict.

CHAPTER VII.

A PERILOUS RIDE.

“O! Hold up! Who are you? Hey?”

Vine was a number of long miles westward and about as many northward from his first battlefield. He had already halted, or Turk had done so for him, in the middle of a considerable village, for he wished to make inquiries and the place seemed peaceable. Just as Turk stood still, however, a very large, important-looking man, in a cocked hat that was mounted upon an uncommonly thick wig, stepped right in front of him and uttered his loud, authoritative demand.

Turk put out his head and whinnied a little contemptuously, but the large man at once added:

“Who are you? Dismount and give an account of yourself. I am a magistrate. Where are you from and where are you going? Dismount!”

Giving an account of himself to strangers by the way was the very thing it was Vine's military duty not

to do, and yet the people of any village had a right to ask just such questions.

“What place is this?” asked Vine.

“Get down! Get down!” said the great man. “I’ll find out who you are. It isn’t a time for loose troopers to go marauding around the country. We’ll search you. Give me your gun——”

That was going a little too far, for Vine’s temper was rising. It was his duty not to be searched, and up came his carbine. The lock clicked sharply as he cocked it, and the magistrate got out of the way with a sudden, long stride, shouting as he did so:

“Come on! Men! Seize him! Take him! I’m unarmed!”

Even before he spoke, several men came rushing out of what seemed a kind of small public house close by, and one of these took the great man’s place, putting out a hand for Turk’s reins. His other hand had a gun in it, but for all Vine knew he might be on the same side with himself.

“Who are ye?” he shouted. “You don’t ride through this village ’thout givin’ a ’count of yourself.”

“Hold his hoss!” exclaimed another man. “I’ll git his saddlebags. Pull him right down.”

“Drop your gun!” came from the other side of the narrow street. “If you don’t I’ll riddle ye. Drop it!”

"I don't know who you are," said Vine, "but I'm for Congress."

"Down with Congress!" shouted the magistrate. "Seize him, boys! He's a dispatch rider. Don't let him get away!"

The fellow who reached for Vine's saddlebags was not acquainted with Turk or he would have been more cautious. Beyond a doubt the quick-tempered colt understood that these were enemies. They were on the other side of politics, against him and Vine, and they were interfering with his particular business of carrying dispatches. Besides, this fellow after the saddlebags had put a rude hand on him and another had seized Vine by a leg.

Up and out went the light heels of the black racer. Over and over rolled the saddlebag thief, with a loud yell of pain. Turk's plunge had set Vine free and had torn the bridle from the man in front. A forward bound knocked over the magistrate himself. Then there was a loud bang on the other side of the road and another yell.

"Mister," shouted a woman in one of the windows of the tavern, "if you're for Washington, get out of this! They're Tories! Run! Wish you could kill 'em all."

He heard it as Turk went over the prostrate great

man, not even stepping on him. The bang of that gun had come next and there was more than one yell. Man after man clapped a hand upon himself, here or there or anywhere, for that bit of too hasty sharpshooting had been done with an old wide-mouthed brass blunderbuss, choked full of bird shot.

Turk had just carried Vine and himself out of range, but all the rest were within the broad space over which the storm of little leaden pellets was scattered. Vine turned in his saddle for a look at his enemies, but even the magistrate was rubbing himself frantically. The fellow who had been struck by Turk's heel, however, lay on the ground, and was evidently badly hurt.

"I won't stop to shoot," said Vine, "but I've learned one thing. Just as Stuart told me, and Indian John, 'tisn't safe to ask questions. I've got to find my own way. I mustn't talk to anybody and I mustn't sleep in any house—not if I mean to get through to the camp with these dispatches."

Of course he thought of the Hollow and his mother, and even of his chores, as he rode onward, but when his mind went home he had a great deal crowding into it.

"Father came home from the army to do the plowing last spring," he remarked. "It's been a good

season, but what of it? Who is to get in the corn and potatoes if I'm to be away with the army?"

Precisely that question was troubling thousands of Washington's soldiers whose terms of enlistment were running out. It made them go home instead of staying to fight the enemy. The "crops" took away several times as many men as he lost in all the battles about New York.

"The pumpkins, too," said Vine, but he did not need to be so anxious.

The Hollow boys and girls went home to dinner, excepting some who ate the dinner Mrs. Irwin cooked for them, but after that they all came back. It was a kind of fun to be there, all at once, and it was so very patriotic. They did not know it, but all over the country that year, from haying time until the snow came, there were just such gatherings of the "home guard" that could not fight but that could care for the families of brave fellows who were in the tents, or camping without any tents.

Vine had no thought of any such luxury as a tent. He had not even been chilly the night before, sleeping under a tree rolled up in a blanket. He was reminded of provisions and that sort of thing much more persistently as the afternoon wore away. He met more than one man, on foot or on horseback, although the

roads seemed lonely at an hour when all workers were in the fields. He met women, too, and boys and girls. Almost every person, old or young, hailed him and asked him if he had any news, but he disappointed most of them. He was going to the army, not coming from it. They wanted to see somebody coming from the northward. Some began to ask him too many questions, but in every such case Turk was suddenly in a hurry to gallop away, for Vine dug a heel against him.

“Oh, but I’m hungry!” he exclaimed at length. “So’s Turk, but I won’t risk these dispatches by going into any house. What I want is a hiding place, with water and grass.”

It was by no means hard to find that kind of place just after he had crossed a bright stream of water. All he had to do was to leave the road and ride up the stream until the right spot was found among clumps of trees.

“Now, Turk,” he said, “you’ve carried that saddle long enough. Off with it.”

The moment it was off the colt took a splendid roll in some soft grass, and then he was led to the stream. After a good long drink he was ready for the abundant green supper right there for him.

“That’s what John gave me the rope for,” said

Vine, when he picketed his four-footed comrade at the end of a long "lariat."

But what was he to do for his own supper? Every morsel was gone from his wallet. It would not even do to light a fire and let the smoke tell anybody where his camp was.

"I wouldn't dare to leave Turk," he said. "Somebody might steal him. I've got to stay here and watch."

That meant, also, "stay and be starved," but that was by no means all. September is a pleasant enough month, almost anywhere, but it has its cold, stormy spells away up among the New Jersey hills where Vine was camping.

The sun went out of sight among clouds long before it was time for him to set, and a chilling wind brought a dull, blue mist with it, along the little creek and among the clumps of trees.

It was just so away back in Irwin's Hollow, but that was a pretty comfortable kind of place.

The boys in the potato field might have done less, or given it up sooner, if it had not been for Indian John. Not long after midday he came among them to tell them a great many things. He remarked to several of them, who were getting a little too talkative and were paying more attention to each other's stories of the Tories than they were to hills of potatoes:

“Delaware squaw beat ’em. Squaw hoe potato before white man came to Jersey. Boy lazy. No lift hoe pretty soon. Vi carry ’patches. Other boy ’fraid of too many potato. Big potato kill him. Squaw whoop at him, he run away.”

Hardly any of them escaped him. Even the girls were told that they were not so good-looking as Indian girls, especially such as them as had blonde or auburn hair. One of these he compared to a sumach bush and another to corn-silk, while a third was told that her very pretty brown braid was “heap rope, tie young squaw to tree.”

He did, however, a great deal to keep them agoing, and they were really interested in the way he showed them of storing several huge piles of potatoes for winter, as the squaws were accustomed to do in the old days, before there were any houses or barns or cellars. It was only a wide cavity, hoed out in a dry, sandy place. Straw, hay, or brushwood was put on the bottom; the potatoes were heaped in; more straw and brushwood was laid over them, and then a coating of earth. “By and by, ’fore snow come, put on more,” he said. “Then heap snow keep ’em warm.”

It did not occur to any of them that these potato pits were also a kind of hiding place, or would be if snow enough should fall on them.

Of course the entire field was not gathered, but a splendid beginning was made. So it was in the cornfield. The boys did some husking, but they cut more with their long corn knives and put it into shocks. Some of the smaller boys talked about a corn knife as if it were a kind of cutlass, and of how they would like to cut off Hessians in that very way, three or four stalks at a time, and carry them away prisoners. They did not explain of what use a Hessian would be as a prisoner after he was cut in two.

The Hollow, as a whole, was very quiet that day. A large number of its men, and almost as many women, had been up all the night before. Both sides, Whigs and Tories, felt angry and sullen, but neither side was ready to strike the first blow. They were willing, as yet, to go past one another without speaking or with just as little talk as might be. The Tories felt pretty sure that their day was coming, while the Whigs had a growing perception that there was danger for them close at hand, and that it was a good time for them to be watchful.

The "bee" at Mrs. Irwin's broke up at last, and even the "drones," for they were not all working bees, went home. She was alone again, for Indian John had gone a-fishing up the creek, and she was just be-

ginning to feel dreadfully blue about Vine, when she was a little startled.

No harm came, only a sound of the ends of crutches on the front-room door, and then the voice of Polly Van Tine, with a great deal of pain in it.

"Aunt Irwin! I could hardly get here. I wanted to see you."

"Why, child, Polly! You didn't walk all the way from your house?"

"Dear me! How it hurts! I can't stay. Father mustn't know I came."

"It's all too bad, Polly. Robert has changed so. How can he do so!"

"I don't know," said Polly. "He says the King'll confiscate all the property of all the rebels. He owns so much land, you know. He says we've no chance. But that isn't what I came for. You'll never say I told you. When Vine comes home you may tell him. The muskets and swords and ammunition for the new Tory company are in our garret. There are more to come. If they could all be taken away there wouldn't be any fighting. They couldn't fight. I don't want 'em to. Father might be killed, mother says, and on the wrong side, too."

"Why, Polly Van Tine!" exclaimed her aunt. "I'm glad to know about it, but you're pale as ashes."

There was a sound of wheels in the road, and she sprang to the door.

"Eph Ball!" she shouted. "Hold up! Take Polly into your wagon, and hurry home with her before it rains. She's half sick now. If she got wet 'twould kill her."

"I don't want to," said Polly. "He and father are not friends."

"Eph," said Mrs. Irwin, "she's as true a Whig as you or Vine. Just you lift her in, anyhow. Polly, you go. I'll tell Vine as soon as he gets home. If you see any of the Bakers, tell 'em not to let that man Stuart go out."

Mr. Ball was a big man, and he lifted Polly to the seat in the wagon as if she had been of no weight at all.

"There!" he said. "I don't know what's got into your father, but I won't let you get rained on if I can help it."

Away he drove, and Mrs. Irwin gazed after the wagon, remarking:

"Muskets! Powder! Bullets! Swords! Why, how could Vine do anything about 'em? He isn't big enough."

Even his mother believed him to be only a boy, not a soldier. He himself had felt pretty large all day with the size of his important errand, but just now he seemed

to be shrinking a little, and, if he was not growing younger, he was at least getting dreadfully dissatisfied. He envied Turk, with his plentiful grass, but the colt at last came and stood still and looked at him. He may have been wondering why his two-footed comrade did not go home, but just then there came a soft pattering among the leaves of the tree over their heads.

"Rain!" said Vine. "It's getting dark, too. Anyhow, he'll be safe now. I'll take my carbine and go as far as the bridge and back. I don't know what I'm going for, either."

Turk seemed to think it was partly right, but he was thinking about a stable for himself as Vine walked slowly away. It was a foggy kind of dusk, in which nobody could see far, but just before Vine got to the road he suddenly stepped behind a tree.

"Horses' feet on the bridge!" he said. "If they were friends, I'd speak. I s'pose it isn't just safe."

At that moment a loud, harsh voice in the gloom between him and the bridge called back:

"Come on, boys! He can't be far away now. We'll find him soon's he puts up for the night. We've trailed him first-rate."

"He was a dispatch rider," replied somebody who

was leaving the bridge behind him. "I saw him go by. 'Twould be awful luck if we missed him. Go ahead. We'll get his news out of him."

"Then tie him up and shoot him," shouted the last horseman to cross. "He'd shoot one of us quick as a wink."

"I'm followed!" whispered Vine to himself. "Pretty close, too. Would I shoot one of those men? I don't know but what I'll have to. I s'pose I hit that cavalry officer. I don't know whether or not I killed him."

It was worse to think of than he had ever supposed it would be, but he remembered that the British and Hessians in the road had been shooting at the people in and around the house.

"They'd been killing the neighbors, too," he said. "And those men mean to kill me. They won't get a chance to-night, but what am I going to do in the morning?"

Almost as important a question was, "What am I going to do to-night?" for the wind was rising fast and the fog was changing into sheets and swirls of cold rain. If it had not been for the creek, he could never have found his way back. Twice he waded into it in the dark, and had to wade out as best he could. At last he reached his tree, and there was Turk, dripping pretty


patiently, but exceedingly glad to have Vine with him again.

“It’s well the saddlebags and holsters and cartridge boxes are waterproof,” said Vine. “Nothing else is, except my skin. I s’pose I must lie down and soak. All the soldiers have to every now and then.”

He wrapped his blanket around him and got on the lee side of his big tree, and then it seemed as if the roaring blasts took special delight in gathering rain to swing around that tree upon Turk and him. They had no idea whatever, those blasts, that they were toughening Vine a little more to make a Continental army soldier of him.

CHAPTER VIII.

STUART'S HORSE TRADE.

“HE Hessians are almost here! O Mrs. Irwin! what shall we do?”

“Jessie, child, what do you mean?

Why, they can't be!”

“Yes, but they are,” exclaimed Jessie in the doorway, while Vine's very much startled mother came in from the kitchen. “There's a man at the tavern from over the mountain. He's a Tory. He says there was a fight yesterday near the crossroads. Six of the Hessians and a British captain were killed, but they'd murdered some of the people first.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Irwin. “They were beaten?”

“Squire Van Tine says they'll be here next, and then we'll see.”

“Why, Jessie, we can fight just as those people did. It ought to be a good lesson to Robert and his Tories.”

“Mother says we'll have to fight them first,” said

Jessie, and she added all she knew of the report given by the Tory at the tavern.

There was to be no "helping bee" at the Irwin place that morning, but the most active member of yesterday's swarm was now standing by Jessie listening.

"Ugh! Good!" he remarked. "Six Hess'n. Carry off cap'n, heap dead. No 'calp 'em. Vi get away. Ride hard."

"John," exclaimed Mrs. Irwin, "was Vine there? Did you see that fight?"

"Young squaw tell," he said, nodding at Jessie. "Old chief heap Tory."

"No, you're not a Tory," said Mrs. Irwin. "Jessie won't tell anybody but her mother. Tell me, was Vine there?"

"Vi shoot cap'n off hoss," said John. "Six Hess'n kill. One more Hess'n up road a bit. Bad Indian come tell old chief how he kill. Pow-a-hi-tun-ka away off in wood. Vi ride away. Ugh! Good!"

If Indian John had intended keeping secret the fact that he had witnessed the fight at the crossroads he would have been more than an Indian not to boast to his friends of that "one more Hessian up the road."

Just now, however, as soon as Mrs. Irwin's further questions about Vine would let him, he changed the subject.

“Young squaw tell 'Tuart,” he said. “Find new hoss in 'table. Ride pretty soon. Tory come 'calp him. Hess'n 'tick bay'net in him. No 'tay at Baker. Ugh! John heap Tory!”

He spoke so earnestly, at all events, that Jessie hurried away. His apparent errand at the Irwin place had been the bringing of a string of fish. Even after Jessie went, all that Mrs. Irwin could obtain was a further assurance of the safety of Vine and his dispatches.

“I wish I knew how safe they are now,” she said. “He'll meet more Tories and Hessians before he gets to the army.”

“Ugh!” said John. “Vi 'calp 'em.”

Vine was feeling blue rather than warlike at about that time. He had been shivering in the keen, frosty wind ever since he peeled off his wet blanket.

“R-r-roughest k-kind of st-t-orm,” he had remarked more than once while his clothes were slowly drying.

He exercised all he could, rubbing Turk thoroughly for part of it, but he felt that army life has its disagreeable side. He could not “spring” when the time came to mount, but he clambered into the saddle, and after he was there it did him good to have Turk caper vigorously.

“I guess I came more than forty miles yesterday,”

he said, "but it was roundabout. I'm not that much nearer New York."

That was true, and he had ridden into a region of which he knew almost nothing at all.

"I'll push along, though," thought Vine. "Nobody'll be stirring so early as this."

He remembered, too, what he had heard from the mounted men at the bridge the night before, and that inquiries for him had probably been made all along the road. There would surely be an impression that he had already passed by, but for all that all sorts of people would be on the lookout.

The road he was on was a regular "turnpike," and he had ridden only a few miles before he came to a "tollhouse." The long wooden bar was in its place when Vine drew so hard on Turk's bridle to keep him from leaping over. He had no objection to paying a toll of "three pence for a man and horse," although he knew that riders upon public business were free.

A white-haired and very fat old man stood by the bar ready to swing it out of the way after getting his three pence, but he put a finger to his mouth and shook his white head solemnly. Vine leaned over in the saddle to ask:

"Hullo! what's the matter?"

"Don't speak a loud word," responded the turnpike

man yet more solemnly. "Our folks are gathered at the Town Hall. The Whigs don't know a word about it, and we've got 'em. Keep still!"

"What for?" asked Vine.

"Four strangers in there eating breakfast. Guess they're Whigs. They're waiting for our folks. I heard 'em say they'd shoot one feller that's comin'; drop him on sight. Mebbe it's you. Jest ride on. I didn't let 'em know but what I was a rebel. You don't know who's who nowadays."

He had silently swung out the bar as Vine put a shilling into his hand, and he made no sign of giving back any change; but Turk was not a horse to care for nine pence, and away he went.

The quick thud of his departing hoofs was heard inside the house, and four men sprang up from the table. At the same moment they were summoned by a loud shout from the tollgate keeper.

"Come out!" he roared. "Boys, maybe it's the man you want. He's a trooper. There! He's gone! Shoot!"

"Why didn't you call quicker?"

"What was he?"

"Did he say where he was from?"

"Old man, you've lost him!"

The last speaker may have been his wife, but the

hasty remarks uttered as the man came hurrying out were followed by the rapid banging of four muskets, throwing useless lead along the road after Turk. He was already almost out of musket range, and there was small chance for hitting him.

"He rode a mighty good horse," said the old gatekeeper, looking after Vine.

"Did he seem to have money," asked one of the four, lowering his empty musket.

"Shouldn't wonder if he had, but he wasn't showing it. Packed saddlebags."

"That's the man!" almost groaned the leader of the squad. "He was wuth a thaousand paound sterlin' if we could 'a captered him. It's no use to foller him naow. He'll be took at the village, and we won't make a farthing. We reckoned on haltin' him at this gate."

"Too bad!" said the keeper. "You didn't tell me. He went right by. Why wasn't one of ye out here a-watchin' for him?"

They were furiously angry, but it was plainly their fault, not his. They made him feel badly, however. Almost as disappointed as themselves.

"Why, old man," said the leader, "I ain't no Tory. I ain't no Whig. You ain't, nuther. That chap was ridin' express from the Philadelfy money bags to the York money bags. That there roll behind his saddle,

and them there saddlebags o' his'n and his holsters had gold guineas in 'em. Naow, deon't you wish we'd ha' ketched him?"

"I reckoned there was something about him," growled the tollgate keeper, "he rode so good a hoss."

"Old man," said his wife, "if there's a comp'ny of Hessians in the village there won't any o' those guineas get any nigher New York than they are now."

It appeared, manifestly, that Vine was in danger from the thieves and highwaymen along the road he was to travel as well as from the soldiers of King George and the Tories. He had learned from the keeper that right ahead of him was a village with a "town hall," at which British troopers and armed Tories were gathering.

"He took me for one," said Vine. "I could let Turk go and gallop right through. Guess they wouldn't hit me. Oh, but I'm hungry! Got to bear it, though. Wish I knew just how near the village is, for I've got to ride around it somehow."

Only for three minutes more he galloped on, and then he saw at his right a handsome house within hail from the road. There were women and children in its porch, and Vine called out from before the gate:

"Madame, is this the road to the village?"

A short, trim, middle-aged woman stepped forward to reply:

“ Ride on, sir! I don’t speak to such as you are. I don’t want any Tory——”

“ Hurrah for General Washington!” interrupted Vine. “ I thought everybody out this way was on the wrong side. They’re all trying to shoot me.”

She was at the gate now like a flash, and she swung it wide open.

“ Quick!” she said. “ My husband’s a major in the New Jersey line. Ride in before you’re seen. There’s a troop of horse—Hessians—at the village. Go right through the house. You’d be seen if you went by the lane. The next-door people are Tories.”

Up the steps she went, and Turk obeyed her hand on his bridle as if he knew her and believed her to be a very good woman, fighting for his side.

At that very moment, however, somebody from the next house—the Tory house—set off rapidly down the road.

The major’s wife led Turk along the broad hall from the front door, but Vine had to stoop low not to be scraped off as he went in. He was all the while answering questions, and she halted right there, exclaiming:

“ No breakfast? You lay out in all that storm? Dispatches for Washington? Yes, I know about the

defeat. My husband is safe. I don't know for how long.—Maria, quick! The cold ham! Bread! Sausages! Anything! He mustn't even stop here to eat. They'd murder him!"

The other women and the children were scurrying around excitedly. The young fry seemed to enjoy it, and were in great glee, but Vine understood that he was in deadly danger. Good things were thrust into his wallet, and a broad slice of cold ham was quickly in his hand. It struck him as remarkably fine, well-flavored ham.

"You needn't thank us," said the major's wife, whose name he failed to get after all. "Ride through the barn. Go down the lane beyond to the woods. You can find your way through them and across the next road and the fields and strike the main road again away on the other side of the village. Take a sack of oats from the barn. What a beautiful horse!"

"He's a good Whig, ma'am," said Vine. "He kicked over a Tory yesterday."

He told about the blunderbuss affair, but she was too anxious to hear more. Still, neither of them knew how very little time they had or how fast Vine's dangers were coming after him.

"Your mother's a brave, good woman," she said,

“to let you go. I haven’t any boys old enough. God bless you! Hurry!”

Vine thought she looked beautiful in her patriotic enthusiasm and her motherly care for him. He felt a great deal better all over. The moment Turk’s heels were on the grass again they went up suddenly, for he, too, felt very good. When they came down he pranced around a little to show the major’s wife how he could dance, and then he set out for the barn, neighing quite cheerfully.

It was a grand old barn, that looked as if a company of cavalry could have been stowed away in it. There was much hay above and below, and several answering voices from the stables along the sides told of horses. From underground, or at least from some pen under the main floor, thundered the discontented bellow of an imprisoned bull, and there was no end of crowing and cackling.

“Just the place the Hessian troopers would like to forage in,” thought Vine. “I hope my coming here won’t do any harm to the house people. Things are getting bad pretty fast everywhere.”

Turk stood still and nibbled hay contentedly, while Vine dismounted and tied upon him a small sack of oats.

“You’ll have to eat them somewhere else,” he said,

and in another moment he was in the saddle. Then they were instantly out of the barn and on their way toward the woods. All around him things wore a very peaceful look, and the thought came to him:

"Just like the patch behind Uncle Bob Van Tine's barn. Wish I knew how they all are at the Hollow."

There, as here, the peaceful aspect of affairs was altogether deceitful. Jessie Cameron reached her own home from Mrs. Irwin's, but she had hardly finished repeating the Susquehannock's message before her mother exclaimed:

"Dinna ye understand him? He bids us tell Stuart he's in danger. We'll go straight to Baker's. The Tories are comin' to take the laddie. Coom!"

They set out at once, and they were well on their way when Walter Baker, at his forge, brought down his hammer with a great bang and said:

"Polly!"

There she was, in the door of the shop, glancing around in a half-frightened way.

"Mr. Baker," she said, as soon as she was sure he was alone, "haven't they taken Mr. Stuart's horse out of your barn? I heard them say he couldn't get away."

"He isn't there," said Baker. "I know it, but I haven't told Stuart."

"He ought to know," she said. "I'm afraid something worse is coming."

"They might arrest him," growled Baker. "They might take him as a prisoner of war, that's a fact, if we couldn't defend him."

"Oh, it's worse than that," said Polly. "I heard them. Father said he wouldn't let them shoot him, but he can't help himself. I'm going in to tell Stuart."

"Go right in," replied the smith. "I'll take a look at the barn first. Tell him all you know. There's Jessie and her mother coming. They're in some kind of hurry, too."

He did not wait to know what might be the cause of their haste, but strode away, and there were two girls instead of one to carry the alarm into the house.

"Jessie," said Polly, "that levtenant or some of his men has stolen Stuart's horse just as it was getting well."

"He couldn't ride, anyhow," replied Jessie, "but Indian John says he must. Says he'll have a new horse, but the Tories are going to scalp him."

That was just as they somewhat excitedly entered the sitting room, and there stood Stuart, still pale and weak, but evidently able to walk around. His face brightened up as his visitors came in, but before he could speak a word Polly began:

"You are in danger, Mr. Stuart. It is not safe for you to stay."

"I know it," he said; "but how am I to get away? My horse is unfit for a long trip."

"The Tories have taken him, anyhow," exclaimed Jessie, but she followed with a full account of Indian John's puzzling message.

Polly also had something to tell, and it all looked dark for Stuart. So dark that he sat down, and so did they all, to consider the matter.

Walter Baker was sure enough that Stuart's horse was not in his barn; and he may have been anxious about his own, for he said as he entered:

"They'd keep me from lending him one."

"Ugh!" responded a hoarsely sarcastic tone from within the nearest stall. "Old chief catch Baker. Where Baker find levtenant hoss? Ugh! John heap Tory."

"Hullo!" exclaimed the smith, stepping quickly forward. "I saw him riding that very nag. Pretty good one, too."

"Baker heap 'tief. 'Teal hoss in night. Levtenant 'calp him. John 'calp him; no get hammer, put on shoe good. Look!" He held up one of the new arrival's hoofs as he spoke, showing a loose shoe.

"Fact," said Baker, "but I've a good enough hammer right here in the barn. All it wants is tightening."

He proceeded to set it right at once, while Indian John looked on and grinly threatened him with all the possible penalties of horse theft.

The job was a brief one, and it came to pass not a great many minutes later, while Jessie was repeating to Stuart and the rest some things she knew about the skirmish beyond the mountain at the crossroads, that she was interrupted eagerly by Walter Baker.

"Tell it over to me," he said. "I was at the barn, and lost the first of it. I'd no idea Vi Irwin was in it or Indian John."

"I didn't say they were!" exclaimed Jessie. "You mustn't say they were. Mr. Stuart's a soldier of Washington. He won't tell."

"Why, Jessie," said Mrs. Baker, "we're none of us Tories. What I was mourning about is Mr. Stuart's horse."

"Tell me the news, Jessie," said the smith, almost merrily, "and then I've something to tell you and Stuart, too."

"No, I won't," said Jessie firmly. "I won't say a word that John told me not to."

"Don't, Jessie," said Baker.

"But what I want to know," she continued, "is about the new horse."

"He's there," shouted the blacksmith. "I hope you

can ride, Stuart. The Tories are welcome to your used-up nag. I've just fixed the shoes on a better one than he ever was. He's in my stable. I don't know how he got there, but you can take him and start for Philadelphia to-night. You can stand it as far as the Quaker settlement, anyhow."

"I can," said Stuart, standing up very straight. "That was half that made me sick. To be without a horse or with one that couldn't travel. They don't know how little there is left in the one they stole."

"I'm so glad!" said Polly. "But they all think John is a Tory Indian."

"So he is," laughed Mrs. Baker. "But all the Six Nations are on the other side, and he mistakes Hessians and redcoats for Senecas and Mohawks."


"I'll be ready to start as soon as it's dark," remarked Stuart. "It wouldn't be well to let them see me ride away."

"Ride awa'?" exclaimed Mrs. Cameron. "Why, laddie, are ye daft? Bide till ye hear from Indian John. Ye'll no ride fra' the Hollow wi' a gang o' Hessian cut-throats powdering along behint ye. Ha' ye no sense? There's nocht like a red Indian for a guide among the hills and woods."

"I'll wait till he comes," said Stuart.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RED CROSS FLAG.

“’LL have to play Indian! But how did they find out that I had stopped at that house? Perfect swarm of ’em!”

The aspect of Vine’s affairs was rapidly becoming yet more cloudy. From where he had halted Turk, under the shade of grand old forest trees, he could look back and see the barn, barnyard, and the grounds behind the house. For a minute or so he had seemed inclined to make favorable remarks about the entire homestead and its occupants. He mentioned very strongly the kindly faced and patriotic wife of the major, his own father’s comrade and superior officer in the First New Jersey Regiment. He praised her children, and said flattering things about the other women, particularly one fine old lady, who said she hoped he would die for his country. No doubt she meant well, but it made him think again of her remarks when he saw the mixed crowd that now came pouring toward the barn and even

through it. At first they discovered no traces of the rebel trooper they were in search of, but they were shouting and gesticulating and rushing around industriously.

"The fellows in uniform are Hessians," he said. "All but two or three redcoats. The rest are Tories out of uniform. There can't be many of either kind left in the village. They're all out here after me. I'll push ahead. I almost wish every man of 'em 'd come right along after me."

One of them, at least, must have had Indian ideas about following a trail, for he discovered the fresh prints of Turk's hoofs on the soft ground back of the barn. He shouted triumphantly, and an eager crowd of Tories and Hessians rushed to the spot to look.

There was a brief but noisy consultation over those and other hoofprints that they saw leading toward the woods. Then several hurried back after their horses left hitched in the road, while more than a dozen charged toward the forest on foot.

There were others, skeptically inclined, who firmly declared the horseshoe marks a delusion. There was nothing in them, and those who followed would but lose their time and pains.

It was of no use for them or anybody else to cross-question the people in the house, but the old lady pluckily responded to a German officer;

“Did I see him? Yes, sir, I saw him, and he rode away. He was one of General Washington’s men. I hope you won’t catch him, and I don’t believe you can.”

“I belief you vas right about dot, olt voman,” replied the officer. “I vight not any voman. I vas a man.”

He was a pretty grim-looking soldier, nevertheless, and he was out and out angry that the rebel trooper, whoever he might be, had gotten away. No harm was done to the house or to any one in it, although the Hessian commander had a strong suspicion that he and his men had been induced to waste time there in searching when, if the house people had been loyal to King George, he would have been told something at once and sent on his way.

Vine had a very good start, but he could not go ahead rapidly among the tree trunks and bushes of that tangled piece of woods. He could do better than a man on foot wherever it was at all open, but in other places he had to make circuits. Behind him were men on foot who knew how to get through timber land very well, and away behind them were now a number of men on horseback.

“The road! the crossroad!” exclaimed Vine. “She said there was one, and it runs into the highway in the

middle of the village. I want to get out of this. Then which way shall I go? Hullo! there it is! Quick, now!"

Forward sprang Turk across a narrow piece of pasture land. It was no time to hunt for bars, but Vine saw a place in the fence with only four rails up.

"That'll do," he said. "Whoop!"

Turk screamed a shrill answer as he dashed at the fence, but Vine's swift glance behind him showed him his pursuers already coming out of the woods.

"Their guns are up," he said, and at that instant began a cracking of rifles and the duller reports of smoothbore muskets and shotguns.

"I'm just within musket range," he said, "but they've been running and they can't shoot closely."

It was all like the flash of the priming of a flintlock, for Turk went over the fence as if it had been only a furrow.

Bang! bang! bang! followed the useless powder-burning behind them, but off to his right Vine saw a couple of redcoated horsemen half a mile away, and so he wheeled to the left.

It was directly toward the village.

An instant pursuit and search had been ordered in all directions when the first news came that he was so very near. But for his warning at the major's house,

he could not possibly have escaped. He had obtained a temporary deliverance there, but it now looked as if he was lost altogether.

“ I can ride through the village if there’s no one to stop me,” he thought, “ but I can’t fight so many. If it’s only one at a time——”

There were houses now on either side. Then he saw a sidewalk, a church, a tavern, and in front of the church stood an excited-looking barefooted boy.

“ Hullo! ” he shouted. “ Mister, if you’re the feller they’re after, hold up! ”

“ What is it? ” said Vine, pulling in Turk with some difficulty, although as he halted before that boy the colt seemed to think well of him.

“ They went the other way, most of ’em. They was in the tavern. There’s their flag now. My brother Joe, he’s a minnitman. You go the no’th road, and you kin shoot some of ’em.”

“ How many went that way? ” asked Vine.

“ On’y three or four,” said the excited youngster, “ but you could shoot them and come back with your fellows after the rest. Bring a hunderd of ’em. The Hessians have rid away, but they’ll come ag’in and you can kill ’em all.”

“ One of these days,” shouted Vine, but the eager young Whig called out shrilly:

“ There’s their flag, mister. There’s a feller coming with a gun. He’s a Toree! ”

Vine saw it, the staff of it fastened to a young tree in front of the village church across the street from the tavern—the British ensign, the red cross flag of England, elegantly made of silk, for the colors of a company. There was no guard left to defend it, but already there were heads of spectators, mostly of women and very young people, at all the windows in the neighborhood. Others were rushing out of the houses, and there was a growing group on the sidewalk before the tavern. Vine wheeled Turk toward the tree, and out came his jackknife. Every second was precious, but he felt a wild, burning wish to carry off that banner.

In an instant the staff of it was cut loose from the tree, but Vine was too tremendously excited to shout.

“ Drop it! ” shouted the Tory with the gun, whom the boy had pointed out. “ Drop it, you rebel! ”

“ He’s got it! ” shouted another near him. “ Take it, man! Take it! ”

“ No, you shan’t shoot him! ” That was a mere girl who just then came running up; but there was a louder cry of “ Drop it! ”

Bang! went the gun, a very loud report, and half the panes in one of the church windows went to ruin, for a grist of buckshot hurtled through them.

Small and brown was the hand of the village girl, but the muzzle of that shotgun had been struck up just in time.

“Hur-ror!” yelled the patriotic boy. “Sally did it! Them shot went right over my head. Just look at that winder! Go it, mister! You’ve got ther flag! Hook it! They’re a-comin’! Come back with yer comp’ny and git ’em all. The minnitmen ’round here’ll all jine you.”

Away went Vine, shouting for Congress and liberty as he went, while a clapping of hands and a waving of handkerchiefs behind him told how the Whigs of the village felt about his daring exploit.

“I wouldn’t lose it for anything,” he said exultingly. “It’s a big thing to capture a battle flag. Hurrah! Turk, we took it!”

Turk was an exceedingly practical fellow. He did not waste a breath on mere exultation. He only struck out into his best pace, a long, easy, mile-eating stride, up the northern highway.

Hardly had he and Vine passed the village boundary in that direction before King George’s troopers, British and German, began to arrive from the other points of the compass. There were not many of them, more of the mounted men being Tories not yet in uniform. The absence of the flag was explained quickly enough, but,

if Turk was running at the rate of a mile in three minutes, he had nearly a mile the start of the first trooper that went after him along the north road. A mile is a great deal in a race, especially when the horse ahead can beat the horse behind, anyhow. It was not his pursuers, however, that Vine was thinking of, but the troopers his boy friend at the church had so confidently expected him to shoot when he should catch up with them.

“I wish,” he thought, “there was some road crossing this, so I could cut around. It won’t do to take to the woods just yet. There are too many Tories. Hullo! Now for it! There they are!”

Nearly two miles of road were now behind him, but it would not do to turn back. And yet here, at the very crossing he had hoped for, were no less than four Hessian troopers in their blue and yellow uniform. Very capable soldiers they were, too, trained in the severe school of the European armies they had served in. The only disadvantages they now labored under were that they had dismounted to let their horses rest, and that they did not speak any other tongue than German.

They saw Vine dashing toward them along the road, but the fugitive they were in search of was supposed to be in advance of them somewhere. Of course, the corporal of the squad stepped out into the road, carbine

in hand, and shouted "Halt!" while the others held their own carbines in readiness for immediate use. There was no time for either of them to mount, but each of those three stepped nearer his horse, very soldierlike. They really did not imagine that an order to halt, backed by four guns, would be disobeyed by any kind of rider.

Vine's thoughts were traveling with lightning rapidity. Instead of pulling in Turk, he gave him the reins loose and dug a shoe heel into his side. At the same moment he unfurled and swung out the silken flag, the brilliant British ensign, which he had captured, and he shouted:

"Messenger with dispatches! Get out of the way! I can't stop."

It was a most extraordinary performance. The three other Hessians looked anxiously at their corporal, and he was almost gaping as he stared wild-eyed at Turk and Vine. He could not fire on the very flag he served under. This man might be following the fellow they were hunting for. He had a flag, he was probably on urgent duty. They had no orders to shoot.

"Halt!" again shouted the corporal as Turk sped past him. "Vas is dis? I know not, mein frient. Ho! Yah? Dunder!"

The flag had fairly brushed his bearded face as it swept by, and in a moment more it was beyond all hope

of being called to any account of itself by that squad of Hessians.

“Mount!” commanded the corporal, and they were quickly in the saddle, but what to do when they got there they knew not, for the astonishing flag bearer was away out of shot.

“Turk,” he shouted, “we’ve beaten ’em! I’d no idea the British flag’d ever be good for anything to you and me.”

Back in the village behind them there was noise enough making about the company colors. Nobody there had ever before seen so angry a lot of men, but behind the doors and windows of many of the houses there were people who were absolutely gleeful over Vine’s exploit. Some slipped out before a great while and carried the news to the major’s house, to find out in return just how it was that the carrier of the dispatches from Congress to Washington had managed to ride through the house, the barn, the woods, and then through the village. It was somewhat later before the Tories and their army friends also knew just how Vine had ridden through the party in the road.

As for him, it was another mile of running before he felt safe to bring Turk down to a sober canter. He rolled up the flag, and was in more than a little doubt as to what might be the best thing to do with it next.

The day was passing, however, and he was all the while getting on very well with his journey. It was a pity, he thought, that all this fast riding could not be in a straight line for New York and the army, instead of in so many roundabout and crisscross directions.

“Wish I could see Indian John,” he added. “He knows all this country like a book. It wouldn’t do to try and find my way across the hills through the woods. I’d get lost. Lose time, anyhow. It takes an Indian for some things.”

He was right about that. Away back in Irwin’s Hollow there was a steady increase in the disturbance of the public mind. Perhaps the worst of it came from the fact that people felt uncertain as to where their neighbors stood or which side they would finally take. Some felt uncertain about themselves, and wished that they knew which side was going to win. Men like Walter Baker, who had already spoken out clearly, were most in doubt as to when actual fighting was to begin. In the blacksmith’s house, however, was one man who felt that his greatest uncertainty was as to whether he could get away from it.

Stuart felt strong enough to travel if it were not too far, but there was in him no strength for a fight nor even for very hard riding.

“I think I can get to Philadelphia,” he said to Mrs.

Baker about the middle of the afternoon. "I mustn't stay here. You've all been so good."

"Not a bit of it," she said crisply. "It seems dreadful that we can't make you safe in our own house. I came in to say that Indian John is at the back door. He wants to see you."

"I'll go right out," said Stuart.

He did so, and there stood the old Susquehannock as grave as a judge.

"Ugh!" he said. "Heap bad for 'Tuart. New hoss got away. Out of barn."

"Gone, is he?" exclaimed Stuart in sudden dismay. "Why, Baker said he was there. I haven't even seen him yet. He said he was a good horse, too."

"Heap good hoss," said John. "Baker t'ief. 'Teal saddle, bridle, blanket. 'Teal 'Tuart gun. Take 'em all down road beyond Bob Van Tine. 'Tuart crawl? Ugh!"

"Oh!" exclaimed the soldier. "You took them down there. The Philadelphia road goes by Van Tine's. I must snake it through the corn to get there. All right."

"Old chief heap Tory," remarked John. "Get 'Tuart into wood. 'Calp him. Sell 'calp to King Jaw. Say he Seneca 'calp."

"That's it," laughed Stuart. "Mrs. Baker, I must

go right away. I know what he means. They are coming after me sooner than we expected."

Her husband himself had been sent for, and he had come in.

"Stuart," he said, "don't wait for anything. I wish we could make a fight of it, but we're not ready yet."

"You'll have to get ready pretty soon," replied Stuart, and they all talked fast during the few minutes left for his preparations. All but Jessie Cameron and Mrs. Irwin herself, for they were there, and, instead of saying much to Stuart, they every now and then whispered to each other something about Vine, and how he too was in danger from the redcoats and Hessians and Tories.

At the end of it all, as they stood in the kitchen doorway, they thought they could see Indian John on the farther side of Baker's meadow, in the edge of the corn, holding up a long cornstalk.

"You can get there without being seen," said the blacksmith, and amid a chorus of good-byes and blessings the gallant young cavalryman slipped away.

"Seems as if he was one of our own flesh and blood!" exclaimed Mrs. Irwin.

"He's a kind of army cousin," said Jessie.

He felt very warmly indeed toward them, but he was especially glad to find himself so well able to walk.

All of his risks, or nearly all, would be over as soon as he should be in the saddle. His friends saw no more of him after he entered the cornfield. If the sly old Susquehannock was there to meet him, they did not know it, but less than half an hour afterward Indian John stood at the gate of the Van Tine place uttering a loud, fierce "Whoop!"

Out hurried the squire and several men with him, including the "levtenant" who had so strangely missed his very valuable horse the night before.

"Hullo!" shouted the squire. "What is it?"

"Bob no come when old chief send!" exclaimed the Indian. "Heap fool! 'Tuart get away. John been to Baker. Bob go see shop."

"Stuart getting away!" roared the Englishman. "Who let him have a horse?"

"Ride brown hoss," said John. "White 'pot on face. Heap tail. Heap good hoss."

"Why didn't you stop him?" sternly demanded Squire Van Tine.

"Old chief no gun," meekly responded John. "Heap lame. No shoot without gun. Lame Indian no catch hoss. Why Bob 'tay home? What levtenant do? Old King Jaw 'calp 'em! Let 'Tuart get away!"

To all appearances the old Susquehannock had been the only servant of King George in that valley who had

been wide-awake and actually watching the Continental trooper. He told them so with scornful energy, and then, as soon as they could mount their horses, he somehow allowed them to decide that Stuart could not possibly have taken the Philadelphia road past the Van Tine place. Not one horseman had passed it, they were positive. Of course, they said, Stuart had gone back to his own camp by the road up the valley, and so they galloped away through the village, only pausing at the blacksmith shop long enough to ask Baker what had become of Stuart.

"Gone? Of course. The women told me so," he said. "But he went from the house afoot. I've been right here all day. Couldn't tell you a thing."

"I knew he couldn't," groaned the lieutenant. "But how did Stuart get hold of my horse?"

"Tory 'teal him," Indian John had suggested at Van Tine's. "Sell him to 'Tuart. Tory 'teal levtenant 'calp no watch him. Bob better 'tir quick when John call him. Lose Vi. Lose hoss. Lose 'Tuart. Ugh!"

CHAPTER X.

THE FLEET AND THE FORTS.

“**P**OLLY,” said Squire Van Tine gloomily, “girls don’t think. There won’t be any Congress pretty soon. Washington is defeated. He has lost New York. General Howe will have all the Jerseys before winter. The rebels can’t stop him. Irwin’s Hollow will be full of redcoats.”

Polly had been asking questions that had probed her father pretty deeply. Her face was very earnest. It seemed to her, too, that another kind of pain was shooting all over her. She loved her father, and she knew that her mother loved him. Could the Americans be all wrong and the British all right just because the Continental army had been beaten? Then she thought of Vine and of Stuart and of the Hollow men who were in the patriot army; but she was silent and so was Mrs. Van Tine, but they looked at each other and they may have been thinking alike.

“Sarah,” said the squire as he arose and walked out,

“what would you and Polly do without any farm and without any money? We shall lose every penny if we’re on the wrong side.”

He was gone, but Polly’s face changed its expression as she suddenly exclaimed:

“Mother, I’d lose it! Other people don’t stop to think. They fight!”

“You and I can’t fight,” said Mrs. Van Tine, “but I wish I knew where your cousin Vine is this day.”

It was in the afternoon of the day after Stuart rode away upon the English officer’s horse. As for Vine, he had been riding steadily ever since getting up from a cold and comfortless bivouac in some woods. He had kept Turk down to his work with some occasional difficulties, but the day had passed without any kind of real excitement.

“I’ve managed,” said Vine to himself, “to ride clean around the villages. Some of ’em were big ones, too. I can’t guess where I am exactly, but I must be getting along toward the Hudson.”

He was getting impatient, not to say anxious, and he almost unintentionally let Turk know it.

Away sprang the colt at the first intimation that he might go as he wished to, and he made his own time during the next thirty minutes. Vine was now better accustomed to the saddle and the stirrups, and he rode

very nearly as well as he could have done without them. It made no difference to him that Turk was taking such a reckless, headlong pace up that northeasterly stretch of road. Now and then in the distance, through gaps in the lines of trees, he could see highlands northward, but he did not know what they were. It was a level region, thickly settled, and he was now passing somebody or other or a wagon every few minutes. Hail after hail was sent at him, but no answer went back.

“What makes ’em yell so?” he said aloud. “That last fellow raised his gun.”

He had forgotten one part of his outfit. He still carried in his hand the captured British flag. It had become unrolled as he rode, and it was now fluttering full width as he and Turk dashed onward. It was a peculiarly brilliant bit of silk, but this time it had been swung out in a neighborhood where nothing else just like it had recently been seen.

Vine did not think of it at first, and Turk did not know or care about flags so long as he was getting onward so finely.

They were now meeting or passing not only civilians but military men, squads of them, on foot or on horseback, and to all of them the black racer under British colors was a tremendous astonishment. Wildly excited and angry shouts greeted him and his rider. Pistols

were fired, sabers flashed from their sheaths, and a full score of horsemen between whose ranks he dashed turned furiously to follow.

“I can’t hold him!” groaned Vine. “What’s gotten into him? It’s a complete runaway! It’s the British flag! That’s what makes ’em so mad. I don’t know what to do. But I won’t drop it till I get there.”

It was a splendid run. Perhaps Turk mistook it for a race against time, and believed all the shouts to be either praise or encouragement. At all events, he won it over everything.

Still clinging to his flag with one hand and hauling upon the reins with the other, Vine sped past a long train of wagons and saw at a little distance before him a gateway in a line of closely set and pointed palisades. Beyond the gateway frowned a pair of iron six-pounder cannon, and on either side were guards, infantry, and cavalry.

Away in the distance he caught a glimpse of higher ground, with fortifications, more cannon, many soldiers, and over all from a tall staff floated a flag of Stars and Stripes.

“Fort Lee!” shouted Vine almost in an agony of surprise and mortification. “I’d no idea that I was anywhere near it. I wish I could pull in Turk so I could roll up this flag!”

Turk's blood was up too high just then, for not many lengths behind him galloped the rivals against whom he was running that race. They were well-mounted men, and most of them wore a kind of helmet with a long horsetail plume.

Turk's charge, therefore, had taken him almost through the middle of a company of Virginia Light Horse. It was their duty, of course, to pursue and capture any fellow insulting them with a British flag on their own ground.

"Halt!" shouted the sentry at the gateway, presenting his musket, but on went Turk and off went the gun.

It was only a warning shot, not intended to hit anybody, but Vine was now suffering from a thrill of mortification that was strong enough to have knocked him out of the saddle.

There was worse to come. The line of palisades so far outside of the earthworks of the fort itself was the protection provided for a wide camp and parade ground. Upon this at that hour the entire force of Continentals stationed at that post was drawn out upon "parade" for review and inspection. There were over four thousand men, variously armed and raggedly uniformed. Still, they were well drilled and soldierly, and they seemed a tremendous army to the astonished eyes of Turk's rider.

At about the middle of the long line of patriot soldiers at that moment rode a pair of horsemen who were evidently of high rank, followed at a short distance by others in reasonably good-looking uniforms.

The larger of the two men, a splendid-looking officer in spite of his simple "buff and blue," had just raised his cocked hat to acknowledge a hearty cheer that arose along the line. He was replacing it upon his head when he heard a sharp exclamation at his left.

"What is it, General Greene?" he asked.

"Your excellency," exclaimed Greene, a little bewildered, "look! He's coming this way! The British flag!"

"Arrest him!" said General Washington calmly. "Colonel Burr, you will see what that is."

"Crazy!" sprang to the lips of a slight-looking young officer nearest them. But there was no time given for anybody to do anything.

Turk had not exactly captured Fort Lee, but he had now raced into the middle of the camp, and he may have believed himself to have reached the winning post. At all events he charged directly up to the spot where the general stood and halted in front of him, prancing a little, as if justly proud of the feat he had performed.

"What do you mean, sir?" roared General Greene.

"Dispatches from President Hancock for General

Washington,” replied Vine as loudly as a choke in his throat would let him. “Stuart broke down at our place. Turk and I went to Congress, and here we are. He got away from me. Nobody can hold him.”

“Through from Philadelphia!” exclaimed Washington. “Greene, this is of vast importance. He must not speak to anybody.—Colonel Burr, take care of the messenger. Bring him to me as soon as the review is over.”

“My father is in the First New Jersey,” said Vine to the officer. “I want to see him.”

“Over in Fort Washington,” said the young aid-de-camp, who was afterward to be Vice-President of the United States. “You can’t see him or anybody till after you have reported to the general. Ride this way, sir. Splendid horse that. Just the mount for a dispatch rider.”

“He outran ’em all on the way,” began Vine, but Burr interrupted him:

“That flag! Where did you get it?”

“Captured it from a company of British and Hessians,” said Vine. “They are raising the Tories all through the middle of the State.”

“Tell me all about it,” said Burr, as cold as ice and, Vine thought, as sharp as a razor.

He was only doing his duty, however, and he did it

exceedingly well. Before Vine was allowed to dismount he was conducted inside of the earthworks. They really were extensive, but they seemed tremendous to Vine, and the guns mounted upon them were so large that he could hardly answer Colonel Burr's questions for looking at them. They shortly came in front of what had once been a farmhouse, and was now General Greene's headquarters. Washington himself was at Fort Lee only to consult with him and to inspect the troops.

"Get down, sir," said Burr. "Orderly, take this man's horse. Take good care of it now. He'll need it soon enough.—Now, my young friend, explain. How did you get in through Harry Lee's Light Horse carrying that thing?"

"Turk went right through 'em before they knew it," said Vine, and now Burr broke into a hearty laugh.

Very close and minute, nevertheless, was his examination of every mile of Vine's trip from Irwin's Hollow to Philadelphia and back to New York. At the end of it all, for he had led Vine into a room in the house, he went out and left him sitting alone.

"He locked me in," thought Vine. "There's a sentry at the door. I'm a kind of prisoner. He took that flag with him, but I s'pose he'll tell Washington where it came from."

Out upon the parade ground the review of the troops by the commander in chief had been nearly completed when Vine dashed in. The cavalymen who had followed him had halted at a respectful distance, and nothing seemed to have at all disturbed the iron dignity of Washington. Although he held in his hand papers of great importance, and must have been eager to read them, he did not hasten anything. Regiment after regiment was dismissed and marched away, and it was not until he had entered the headquarters of General Greene that an envelope was torn open.

“Greene,” he said, “my friend, I must know how they took the news. I wrote to Hancock the exact situation.”

“Read, general,” replied Greene in a voice thick with excitement, and Washington’s own face was white as he began to do so.

“Greene!” he exclaimed. “Thank God! Hancock is sound to the core! Bless old Ben Franklin! He says he is going to France for money and troops and fleets. Bless them all! I must see that boy. Tell Burr to come in.”

In he came, and he was hardly more than a boy, not yet twenty. Rapidly, clearly, he reported Vine’s account of his doings in Philadelphia and on the way, and then the door of the room Vine was in swung open

and he was brought across the hall to stand before the greatest man he had ever heard of.

It was an awful moment. It was worse than facing the council of great men in the Independence Hall building in Philadelphia. The thought in his mind was:

"All of 'em put together wouldn't be as big as Washington. He commands the whole country."

Out upon the parade ground in front of the troops he had seemed, as Vine had always imagined him, a kind of king for everybody else to look up to and to obey. Right here, in this dingy room, with nobody near him but Greene and Burr, his face looked kinglier than ever. Nobody but Washington himself could have guessed with what anxiety he had waited to know what Congress would say about the defeat of his army and the loss of New York.

"He looks, too, as if he had been anxious," thought Vine, "but then men like him never show it much."

He did not speak for a moment, but looked down into Vine's face, and Vine felt all his fear and bashfulness flash away. He could not help looking straight back and smiling.

Washington's own face brightened, and he said:

"God bless you, my boy! You have done me a great deal of good. Is there anything else besides what you told Colonel Burr?"

"The boys are all on our side, sir. The girls are, too. All the way. I didn't find any Tories but the grown-up people."

"I don't believe there are any," growled General Greene. "Or only a few."

"The Quaker woman's message," said Colonel Burr. "Tell him that."

"Tell it!" said Washington curtly.

"She's more than a hundred years old, sir," said Vine, still staring into the face of the commander in chief. "She wouldn't let me get off my horse, but she came and stood out there in the rain. Her hair was white. It was pretty dark, too, but I could see her, and she said, 'Tell the man George Washington, the leader of thy men, to be of good cheer, for God, even our God, will surely give him success, and this people shall be free.' That was all, sir."

Not a sound came from the compressed lips of General Washington. He stood as still as a statue for a number of seconds. It seemed very long to Vine. Not a word came from either of the others.

"It's awful solemn!" thought Vine. "What a man he is! He's going to speak again."

"Boys like you," said Washington, "do not need to be thanked for serving their country. Go, now.—Burr, see that he is cared for. Let him go over to visit

his father. I shall want him again. I feel as if these papers were a strong re-enforcement."

Out went Vine, but when he spoke to Colonel Burr about Turk he was told:

"Don't you worry. You'll have him in good condition when you ride across Jersey again. The general knows all about horses. Hullo! Come with me to the works. You'll see something."

He said it almost gleefully, as if the tremendous roar of cannonading that came so suddenly were a kind of war music that he delighted in. Vine, too, was conscious of a strong thrill, a battle feeling, stronger than he had felt when he captured the flag. They almost ran toward the riverward side of the fort. Burr sprang upon an earthen rampart, and Vine followed him. Right and left of them were embrasures in the rampart, with heavy cannon looking through them and sullen-faced artillerymen standing by.

"We can't waste any powder just now, men," said Burr. "But what loads of it the ships are burning!"

Vine had never dreamed of seeing anything so splendid.

Away out in the broad river, with their clouds of white canvas spread to let the light south wind keep them there against the current, were about a dozen ships of war. They were the best ships of the British navy,

the greatest navy in the world, and they had been sent to annoy the American forts on either side of the river. The British commander knew that the Americans were short of powder, while he was not. He wished to learn as much as he could concerning the strength of the forts and to do them as much damage.

The ships were perfectly handled. One after another they swept within range and swung gracefully around to pour their thunderous broadsides at Fort Lee. Then, as each passed on and tacked, it would send its other broadside at Fort Washington, on the opposite heights.

"The other fort is firing, sir," said an artillery officer to Colonel Burr. "If we could only give 'em one round."

"That's Aleck Hamilton's work!" exclaimed Burr. "That frigate came within range of his guns. Down goes her mainmast! Boys, let 'em have it! That seventy-four as she tacks!"

Even as he spoke a storm of heavy shot came pelting against the rampart. One ball tore the top of it within three paces of him and Vine.

"Hurrah!" shouted Vine in hotter excitement than he had ever before felt. "Now it's going to be our turn. Hit 'em! There!"

The long, hungry-looking thirty-two pounder at his

right spoke out. Then another at his left. Not in loose broadsides, like those fired by the ships, but with careful aim not to waste precious ammunition. Gun after gun was fired with excellent precision.

"Splintered some of her spars," said Burr, eying through his glass the tall, magnificent seventy-four-gun ship of the line. "We've raked her! Swept her quarter deck! Stove in her cabin windows! Give it to her!"

Down he sprang then, for not many rods away stood Washington himself watching the firing; but Vine stood still, forgetting altogether that he was in any danger.

"Get down, young fellow!" shouted one of the artillerymen. "You're of the right stuff, but you couldn't catch a round shot like you would a baseball."

Vine obeyed orders, and the next instant the spot he had stood upon was torn by a globe of the flying iron.

"Narrow escape," said the soldier, but Vine had a disappointed feeling, for now he could not watch the British fleet except through the embrasure while the men were loading.

"They've had enough," said Washington to an officer near him. "They have learned better than to

come within the cross fire from these two forts. No fleet could stand it. If they try to take Fort Washington, it will be on the land side only."

"Father is there," thought Vine. "I want to get over there as soon as I can, but there won't be any ferrying done till that fleet's out of the way. I wish mother and Jessie and the rest could have seen this battle."

It was what army men call "an engagement" rather than a "battle," but it had been a very fine one for an hour or so.

"I guess General Washington feels better," said Vine aloud as he turned away to follow an orderly that came for him.

He did not think of being overheard, but a deep and kindly voice behind him responded:

"All things are safe now I know that Congress is not disheartened, nor the boys nor the girls."

More than a year before that Washington had asked about the battle of Bunker Hill when the British drove the Americans from their breastworks there:

"Did the militia stand fire?"

When told that they did, he replied:

"Then the liberties of the country are safe."


He was a statesman as well as a general, and he knew that the greatest effect of any battle is upon the people

who hear about it rather than upon the men who fight in it.

Vine could not understand him altogether, but the roar of the cannonading died away, and he was willing to be led to his quarters and to go and make sure of Turk's welfare.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRE ON THE DOORSTEP.

“ESSIE,” said Polly Van Tine, “do you know, I somehow don’t feel as lame as I did. Seems to me it doesn’t hurt me so much to walk.”

“I wish you could run!” exclaimed Jessie. “Oh, it is so good to run! I love to. I know how Turk feels when he won’t let Vine hold him in.”

She looked a perfect embodiment of girlish energy, and there was a manifest increase of color in the face of Polly.

“We must get there, anyhow,” she said. “I want to know who is going to join the Tory company. Father won’t. Mother made him promise not to, but he paid for the drum. Sam Sturgis made ’em a present of a fife——”

“I don’t know what to make of Sam,” said Jessie. “I just know he’s a Whig.”

However that might be, the more active Tories in

and about the Hollow had decided that the time had come to show themselves. The "levtenant" had been busy among them. He had not been able to get any recruits to actually take the service oath as soldiers of the British King, but they had consented to assemble in front of the village tavern. He knew, and so did anybody else, that they would feel more courageous and more loyal to the King if only they could be got together to show themselves how many they were.

All that afternoon they had come along, straggling or in little groups, and some only came to go away again. Others who came were not well understood to be Tories, and some were there whose kindred, and probably their own hearts also, were with Washington.

Jessie had come after Polly with a very queer look on her face, and had begged her to go up to the village and see the new soldiers march.

"Indian John is there," she said, "with two big red feathers in his old straw hat, but he didn't bring any gun. It's fun to look at him."

Polly was using her crutches, but was doing it pretty well, as if her arms as well as her feet had more strength in them, and Jessie showed a curious inclination to dance. That, too, was somewhat like Turk.

All the boys of the Hollow were somewhere in the

neighborhood of the blacksmith shop and the bridge when the girls got there, but there was the queerest kind of parade in front of the tavern.

Squire Van Tine was there, and he was making something like a speech to a crowd that hurrahed every now and then for King George and for General Howe, but that somehow seemed to do almost as well when somebody shouted:

“Three cheers for General Washington!”

Just at the end of that cheering, Indian John let off a prolonged war whoop, and began to walk up and down with his head up and his hands at his sides, soldier fashion.

“Raw for King Jaw!” he shouted. “Where gun? Time Bob shoot W’ig! ’Calp ’em! Make ’em ’top noise.”

“That’s so, Van Tine,” exclaimed the English trooper angrily. “He’s right! We must make an example of the next rebel that opens his mouth.”

“Levtenant give old chief new gun!” said John. “Heap shoot. Where men? Bob talk a heap. He no fight rebel.”

“All the recruits fall in!” shouted the lieutenant, as if encouraged by the red warrior’s persistency. “Bring out that drum! Fall in!”

Nearly a score of fellows, of all sizes, obeyed pretty

promptly, but twice as many more did not seem to be quite ready.

In front of the line the lieutenant posted himself to give orders, and facing him was the grim, woodenish visage of Indian John, with his preposterous feathers and with more limp than usual, first in one leg, then in the other, as if he had been wounded twice.

Out came the drummer, slinging his big bass drum as he came, and behind him marched the gray-headed Tory who had volunteered to fife but not to be sworn in as a soldier.

A minute or so was expended in an effort to make the new company stand in lines, but not all of them seemed to know what a line might be. The lieutenant was trying hard to be civil, but he was failing worse and worse up to the moment when he ordered the fife and drum to begin.

Bang! went the drum with a queer kind of thud, as if it had some internal trouble, but the fifer blew disastrously. His first puff sent a cloud of fine flour out of all the holes except the one his mouth was on, and the second only produced a kind of dying wheeze. The drummer was a strong fellow, and he pounded with power, but to his great disgust the knobs of his drumsticks went right through the parchment drumheads, and there was no more sound.

Shouts of derision arose from the crowd, and the lieutenant swore savagely.

"I told you so," whispered Jessie to Polly. "Sam said his fife wouldn't play anything but Yankee Doodle, but they could try it on."

"Look at Indian John!" exclaimed Polly. "He is scolding the levtenant!"

So he was, gravely accusing him of having cut holes in the heads of that drum and of having plugged the fife.

"I guess there won't be any training to speak of to-day," said Walter Baker, in the door of his shop, "but it isn't any laughing matter. We've got to shoot some of those very fellows pretty soon."

All the genuine Tories were angry, of course, but the object of the muster had not been obtained and the company was not formed that day.

"Levtenant heap fool," said John. "Bob fool, too. Blow whistle! Knock drum! Sojer want gun! Old chief no kill Seneca with whistle. Levtenant go home. Tell King Jaw keep him. Send man with gun, bullet, powder."

There was always so much apparent good sense in what he had to say that the squire and his English friend listened thoughtfully.

"Just so," said the squire. "We've let the

Whigs laugh at us this time. We mustn't do it again."

"We'll teach 'em how to laugh!" hoarsely responded the trooper. "We'll come and burn the houses over their heads."

"Did you hear that?" asked Jessie of Polly. "That's what the Hessians have been doing in some places."

"Then I'll tell you," said Polly, "and I'll tell father when I go home, if the Whig houses are to be burned so will the Tory houses. It'll be awful!"

"They'll burn ours, I know they will," said Jessie, "but mother says she'd rather live in the woods than give up. So does your aunt Irwin. Oh, how I want to see Vi and know what he's been doing. He's seen the army."

"I'd like to see it," replied Polly, "but I must go home now. I feel better. I believe it did me good to laugh at that fife and drum."

As for the old Susquehannock, he walked up the road with his feathers on until he came to the Irwin place. There was Mrs. Irwin in the doorway, and she wore an anxious, troubled face.

"John," she exclaimed, "have the Tories formed their company? Will there be any fighting right here in the Hollow?"

"No fight now," he said. "Red-head medicine squaw wait. Fight a heap one day. John feel bad. No get new gun. No make Bob give gun to W'ig. 'Poil whistle. 'Poil drum. Tory keep gun. Get 'em by and by."

"They'll know whom to give their guns to," she said. "Oh, dear me! It's more than a week since Vine went away. I wish I knew what had become of him."

"Boy all right," said John. "'Tay in camp. See army. Take 'calp. Old chief no 'tay in Hollow. Go Penn'vany. Go York. 'Calp Seneca. Have good time. See King Jaw, 'calp him."

The red warrior's blood had been warmed up a little by his failure to induce the lieutenant and the squire to distribute those new English muskets. If he could have done so, he would have armed half the Whigs in the Hollow.

Mrs. Irwin was not stirred up; she was dreadfully depressed. Mrs. Cameron had wanted her to come to their place to live, but it was at some distance, and the horses, cows, pigs, chickens forbade the departure of their one lonely guardian. She wished she had even a good dog. She felt badly when John spoke of going on another warpath, but she did not think of arguing against it. She gave him a good supper, however, and

she almost laughed when he explained to her about the drum.

After supper he walked out at the back door, and she believed he had departed; but she had only an imperfect idea of the subtle ways of the red men.

"He will go after the Six Nations once too often," she remarked of him. "They will take his own scalp some day. But how he does trick them into thinking he is a Tory! Perhaps he would be if the Iroquois were not fighting for the King."

The rest of the day went away only too fast, and it seemed as if she had never before so hated to have it grow dark. She was an energetic woman, and she attended to all the "chores," every one of which made her think of her husband and Vine and wish they were there with her. Her heart was very heavy when she went to the house again, but it gave a great thump before she got there.

"Jessie!" she exclaimed. "That girl's always running, seems to me. What can be the matter now? Oh, dear! Is it anything about Vine?"

Jessie's first words were like an echo.

"Vine!" she shouted. "Mrs. Irwin, is Vine here? Has he come?"

"Child, no! He hasn't come. But what made you think he had?"

“Why, Polly Van Tine walked all the way to our house to tell me. She came part of the way without crutches. She was wild over it. That levtenant came, she said, to say the Tories must come here to-night and catch Vi. He’s to be here, they think, carrying dispatches. I don’t know how they heard. Three Dutchmen were with the levtenant.”

“Hessians!” exclaimed Mrs. Irwin. “They’re not Dutch at all. Only some ruffians that King George bought in Germany to fight us with. They’re just like so many wolves. Jessie, you must go right home.”

“You’re here all alone.”

“You must go! I wouldn’t have you stay. Your mother wouldn’t.”

“Won’t you come to our house?”

“What! And not be here if Vine came?” said Mrs. Irwin. “I don’t care if I am alone!”

“Well,” said Jessie, “mother told me to help bar up the house. If Vi was here you and he could go to the woods.”

“They’d burn the house for us if we did,” replied Mrs. Irwin. “I don’t believe he’s coming. Go home now!”

“Oh, I don’t want to!” said Jessie earnestly. “But I s’pose I must. Polly went home right away. She isn’t any kind of Tory.”

“She’s a brave, good girl,” said Mrs. Irwin. “She’s as true as steel. But, oh, how I wish I knew about Vine! If he should come home! And if they should take him!”

“The levtenant would let the Hessians shoot him. He said he would,” interrupted Jessie. “The Whigs ought to shoot every one of ’em.”

“And we haven’t a gun in the house!” groaned Mrs. Irwin. “We can bar the doors now, and you can go, and I’ll be ready to let Vine in if he comes. We’ll know what to do then. How I do want to see him! But I pray he may not come to-night.”

He was not likely to get home that night nor for quite awhile yet. The very evening after he had seen the British fleet and its grand cannonade of Fort Lee and Fort Washington he had been ferried across the Hudson. He had left Turk, as he supposed, under the special care of Colonel Aaron Burr.

The camp of the First New Jersey Regiment was on the heights behind Fort Washington, and it was half an hour after landing when Vine met his father.

It was a splendid surprise on one side, and neither of them could have told just how they felt. That was one reason why they hardly said anything at first. Then Vine remarked:

“Mother’s all right, as well as she can be, but how awful ragged you are!”

Everybody else was in that camp, but all the men from in or near Irwin’s Hollow came crowding around to hear the news from home. Vine was kept talking until pretty late—as late as camp laws permitted—and he had to begin again next morning.

“Sergeant Irwin”—for that was the rank of his father—was proud enough of his young dispatch bearer, and Vine felt himself as much a member of that regiment as if he had been regularly enlisted. During several days that followed he learned a great deal, for he joined an “awkward squad” and was drilled pretty severely, and his own father undertook to teach him how to handle a sword.

During that week it seemed as if both armies were lying still, but their generals knew better. General Howe knew that the American army was dwindling away with sickness, desertion, and men going home because their time of enlistment was out. On the other hand, Washington knew that the British were steadily advancing, and were trying to find just how and where to strike. That had been part of the meaning of the cannonade of the forts.

On this particular day Washington had sent out a strong force of his best troops to meet a pretty bold

forward push of the British, and once more Vine learned something new about war. He marched out of the fort and down the long slope from the heights with the First New Jersey, shoulder to shoulder with his own father and with David Cameron.

"I hope he won't get hurt, for Jessie's sake," thought Vine, but at that moment, in full sight of the advancing British, the Jersey men were halted, and past them marched a Virginia regiment, then some Marylanders, and then two battalions of the Connecticut line. It was magnificent, Vine thought, to see those gallant fellows dash into the smoke and fire of that very sharp engagement. There was a terrific rattle of musketry. He saw men going down by the score. Bullets now came rattling close to the Jerseymen. He heard his father ask:

"Are you hit, Dave?"

There was no answer. At that moment the advancing British line wavered, broke, and began to retreat, and Vine was utterly absorbed in looking. He wondered, too, why all the American troops within reach did not dash in pellmell. That would have been his way, but it is not at all the way battles are fought. He was getting a glimmer of that idea when he heard a low groan behind him, and his father said:

"Vine, my boy, Dave's gone. It went through his

heart. This'll be awful news for you to carry to the Hollow."

It was awful, then, to have to wheel and march back to the fort, leaving other hands, they knew not whose, to bury their dead neighbor, Jessie's father, and the other brave fellows who had fallen.

Jessie knew nothing at all of the "battle of Harlem Heights," but she was at home now in her own house thinking of Vine and of what news he might bring if he came. It was hours after the battle, and the Irwin house seemed as still as death. There were a few brands smoldering on the kitchen hearth, but there was no candle lighted, and Mrs. Irwin sat there as if she were listening, listening, ready to start up at the least sound.

"O my husband!" she muttered. "O Vine! This is dreadful. I wish somebody was here with me. I never felt scared before, often as I've sat here all alone. Hush! Somebody's at that back door. Vine? No! It's Indian John!"

She sprang to lift the bar, as if she recognized some kind of known signal, and, as the door opened, in walked the old Susquehannock, a rifle in one hand and a bayoneted musket in the other.

"Is Vine there?" she asked. "Did he come?"

"Vi no come at all now," he said in a very low voice. "Squaw 'top talk. Vi off in army. Tory heap

fool. Tory come to house. Hess'n come. Ugh! Pow-a-hi-tun-ka want 'calp!"

Straight through to the front went the grim old savage like a black shadow, and he knelt at the front door to peer through the square hole which had been cut in it when it was made. It had a cover which had not often been lifted in latter years, but it had been originally intended for a "shot hole."

At that very moment there came the sound of hoofs on the road and the voices of men.

"Not the Tories," whispered Mrs. Irwin, and she was correct, for only four dismounted at the gate. One of them wore a red coat, but Squire Van Tine and his neighbors were not there. Not even Job Rounds.

"Open the door!" roared a loud, imperative voice at the very doorstep.

"That's the levtenant," thought Mrs. Irwin.

"Open the door!" he shouted again. "We'll have that young wolf this time."

"Vine isn't here," she said. "He didn't get here. I won't open the door to strangers at this time o' night."

"In the King's name!"

"I have no king!" she said a great deal more firmly. "I won't open to the King of England himself."

"Open, or I'll break it in! I'll burn down the



The Indian defends the house.

house!" he shouted, and they heard a number of furious exclamations in German from his followers.

In a moment more they were thundering at the door with a fence rail, but it was too strongly made of thick oak planks, and the rail was of no use.

"If I could find an axe!" they heard the lieutenant say. "I'll shoot her son for her."

"Shoot her, too," came, with a strong accent, from one of the Hessians; but two others were gathering pieces of wood and striking fire with flint and steel.

"They mean to burn us out!" gasped Mrs. Irwin. "O John! what will become of us?"

"Ugh! No talk!" said the Susquehannock. "Heap dark now. Wait. Hess'n make fire."

Armfuls of sticks and brushwood and some wisps of dry grass were thrown at the threshold. Then the lighted tinder was put in, and a soldier stooped to blow it. Up sprang the blaze, and as it did so the lieutenant put a pistol near the loophole in the door and fired.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Irwin, for the ball had grazed her arm.

Down dropped the Indian on one knee, and out at the same hole went the muzzle of his rifle. The trooper was in the very act of cocking his second pistol when it suddenly dropped from his hands. The rifle had cracked, and the lieutenant fell right across the fast kindling fire.

Another iron muzzle went out at the hole, and there was another report.

There could be no missing so close as that, but the two remaining Hessians sprang away toward their horses.

“Want more gun?” said John. “Ugh! Hess’n get away.”

“John,” exclaimed Mrs. Irwin, “we must put out the fire.”

“No!” he said. “Let burn a little. No put out. Let Hollow men see fire. John go now. No ‘calp ‘em. Heap dead.”

“I understand him,” said Mrs. Irwin as he disappeared through the back door. “Let the fire blaze up and call people. It needn’t burn the house.”

It was precisely John’s idea, and it was remarkable how speedily a crowd of mingled Whigs and Tories, both sides equally astounded, gathered around that bonfire in the Irwin front yard to hear the story and to look at the two dead soldiers. There they lay, but all their weapons had gone with the old Susquehannock.

CHAPTER XII.

VINE AND THE ARMY COLONEL.

DOLLY VAN TINE did not know it, but she had been acting as a very efficient spy for the patriots of Irwin's Hollow. She had given them valuable information of the purposes and movements of their enemies, and no outsider was aware that she had done so.

Squire Van Tine had been among the last to arrive at the Irwin place, and then he did not enter the house. He got there at nearly midnight, long after the fire would have died out of itself but for the old rails heaped upon it by the boys to keep it going. Mrs. Irwin had approved of that, for she did not wish to be left in the dark. Her brother-in-law went away again very soon, looking gloomy enough, for this was like a warning of evil to come.

The two Hessians who had escaped did not return. There was no knowing where they had gone. The most

remarkable part of the whole affair, at this end of it, was the conduct of the red-handed Susquehannock who had shot the lieutenant and the Hessian through the loophole in the door. He did not reappear until the following morning, and then Squire Van Tine had returned and stood with a squad of neighbors at the gate considering the matter. They saw him quietly walk out of the house after a breakfast Mrs. Irwin had cooked for him, and not one of them all was so entirely unconcerned. The two dead bodies had been laid on one side ready for removal, but he hardly glanced at them when he remarked to Walter Baker:

“Levtenant heap fool. Hess’n, pig. Old chief shoot ’em. No ’calp ’em.”

“I thought you was a Tory!” roared Squire Van Tine. “You’ve been killing our own men! I’ll arrest you!”

It was not the wisest thing he could have said, for more than half of the men at the gate were not at all Tory, and they had their guns with them.

“Pow-a-hi-tun-ka chief!” said the Susquehannock, standing very straight. “Hess’n burn house! Levtenant kill Pow-a-hi-tun-ka, he no shoot! Ugh! Kill heap. ’Calp King Jaw when he come burn house. ’Calp Bob. No talk old Indian. Heap mad. ’Top burn house! Shoot ’em all! Go on warpath now. ’Calp Seneca. No

Tory. No redcoat. No Delaware. Old chief Susquehannock! Shoot Bob now! 'Top fool talk!"

There was something tigerish in his face and in the lithe, springy manner of his movements as he walked around and poured forth his angry eloquence. Squire Van Tine stared at John in amazement, but the blacksmith sternly remarked:

"That's it, Bob Van Tine! Don't you see how it works? Your accursed Hessians and their murders and their houseburnings have got to be accounted for. Look out for your own roof if this is to go on."

"Walter Baker," replied the squire, "you and I are old neighbors, old friends, but such talk won't do. Nobody can protect such men as you are when the King's troops get here."

"I don't want any protection," almost shouted the sturdy smith. "All I want is a good rifle. I've got one. You Tories'll rue the day you brought your King's foreign hirelings into Irwin's Hollow."

"Bob hear old chief," said the Indian. "Pow-a-hitun-ka heap Tory now. 'Calp for King Jaw. What for? Want house burn? No! Red-head medicine squaw heap good woman. Hess'n come, hurt squaw, then old chief shoot. Kill Hess'n. Kill Tory. Kill Bob. Ugh!"

It was as plain as a pikestaff. The Susquehannock

was like any other red man, and had no other politics or loyalty except such as began at the door of his own house or wigwam.

Mrs. Irwin's care of him and his friendship for Vine had made him a member of their family. He was ready to kill anything that threatened that roof if he had to shoot off the crown of Great Britain. There were great statesmen who did not understand that feature of Indian human nature, nor that all the white people of America were just like the red people so far as their own homes were concerned.

Just now he turned and stalked away through the house past the barns into the woods, while the little group at the gate melted, or rather scattered, in all directions.

"Mrs. Irwin," said the blacksmith before he went, "I guess not many Tories'll feel like troubling your house after that warning. It would be too much like setting fire to their own. John would do it. This piece of work is a loud warning to some people."

"It's dreadful!" she said. "I don't know what I should have done but for John. They would surely have shot me. They said they were going to."

"The devils!" exclaimed Walter Baker. "They'd murder women and children. I'm glad John is with us, though."

The pair that he had killed were carried away and buried. Vine also learned at the north that both sides after a battle allowed "burial parties" to go out and cover the dead unharmed. All the wounded were in like manner cared for, and there were said to be frequent exchanges of prisoners.

"Only, as to that," remarked Sergeant Irwin to his son, "we don't get so many back yet. The account is too much against us. It'll turn some day."

The enemy had been sharply repulsed in the battle of Harlem Heights, but it seemed a kind of waste of men when so little was gained on either side.

Vine awoke next morning under one of the rough sheds that served for tents for his regiment feeling pretty blue. His first thought was of the sad news he would have to carry home some day, and his next was:

"I don't want to go. I want to stay here. I was in a battle yesterday."

So he had been, and he had fought at the side of his own father, although he had not been permitted to fire a shot. Only to stand and be shot at and see others do the fighting. Old soldiers could have told him that that is considered the severest trial of courage and good discipline. He was about to have another and a very severe one. Hardly had he eaten his breakfast before an

orderly rode to that camp and summoned him to the headquarters of the fort.

“Good-by, Vine,” said his father. “I s’pose I know what it’s for. They want you and Turk.”

“I want to stay here.”

“A soldier doesn’t know anything but his orders,” said Sergeant Irwin. “You must go if it’s sure death.”

“It’s pretty nigh it,” said the orderly. “It’s a ride to Philadelphia. They’ve killed lots of our riders. The Tories are getting thicker.”

“Father,” said Vine, “I’ll go. Good-by. Oh, I hope you won’t get killed!”

“I’m safer here than you’ll be on the road. You’ll see your mother. Tell her everything. Tell ’em all. If I’m killed, you take my gun and don’t give up. Good-by.”

Vine could not say a word, but turned and followed the orderly, and in a few minutes more he stood before a rough-looking veteran whom he knew to be Colonel Magaw, commander of Fort Washington.

“Take these,” he said to Vine, handing him a small packet. “Don’t stop a minute on the other side of the river except to get your horse. Don’t try the direct road. You’ll be shot if you do. Ride away around by the west as far as you can, and then down along the Delaware.”

"May I come back by our Hollow?" asked Vine.
"It's a good deal shorter."

"Yes, if you can," said Colonel Magaw. "You know the country. That's why you're chosen to go. Kill all the Tories you can. There are your passes through our lines. God bless you! Start!"

Even the hard-featured commander seemed under a strong feeling that morning. Some of his best friends had fallen the day before, and the outlook for the whole army was not very good.

Vine took his parcel, thin and light but important, and hurried out to be ferried in a small rowboat right across the Hudson to Fort Lee.

One of Colonel Magaw's own men, a corporal, went over with him, but left him there, and Vine was conducted at once to a kind of rude but pretty substantial cavalry stables, where he was to find Turk, the saddle, and the rest of his outfit. The carbine he had all the while kept with him, and here, just as he had a right to expect, were all his other effects, but he looked around in vain for Turk.

"That's the horse you're to ride," said a young lieutenant in charge of the stables, pointing to a thin and scraggy-looking gray in a corner.

"That's the horse I won't ride!" exclaimed Vine.
"Where's mine?"

"I think the colonel of our regiment has him," said the lieutenant. "He picked him out. You can't help yourself. You're in the army, my boy."

That might be, but Vine's temper flashed fire. If the Revolution meant anything to him, it meant that Americans were to have their rights, and he rebelled at once.

"Go and tell him to bring me my own horse, or I will report him to General Washington for a thief!"

The words sprang to his lips before he thought, but they were uttered, and instantly a kind of roar of amazement sounded behind him.

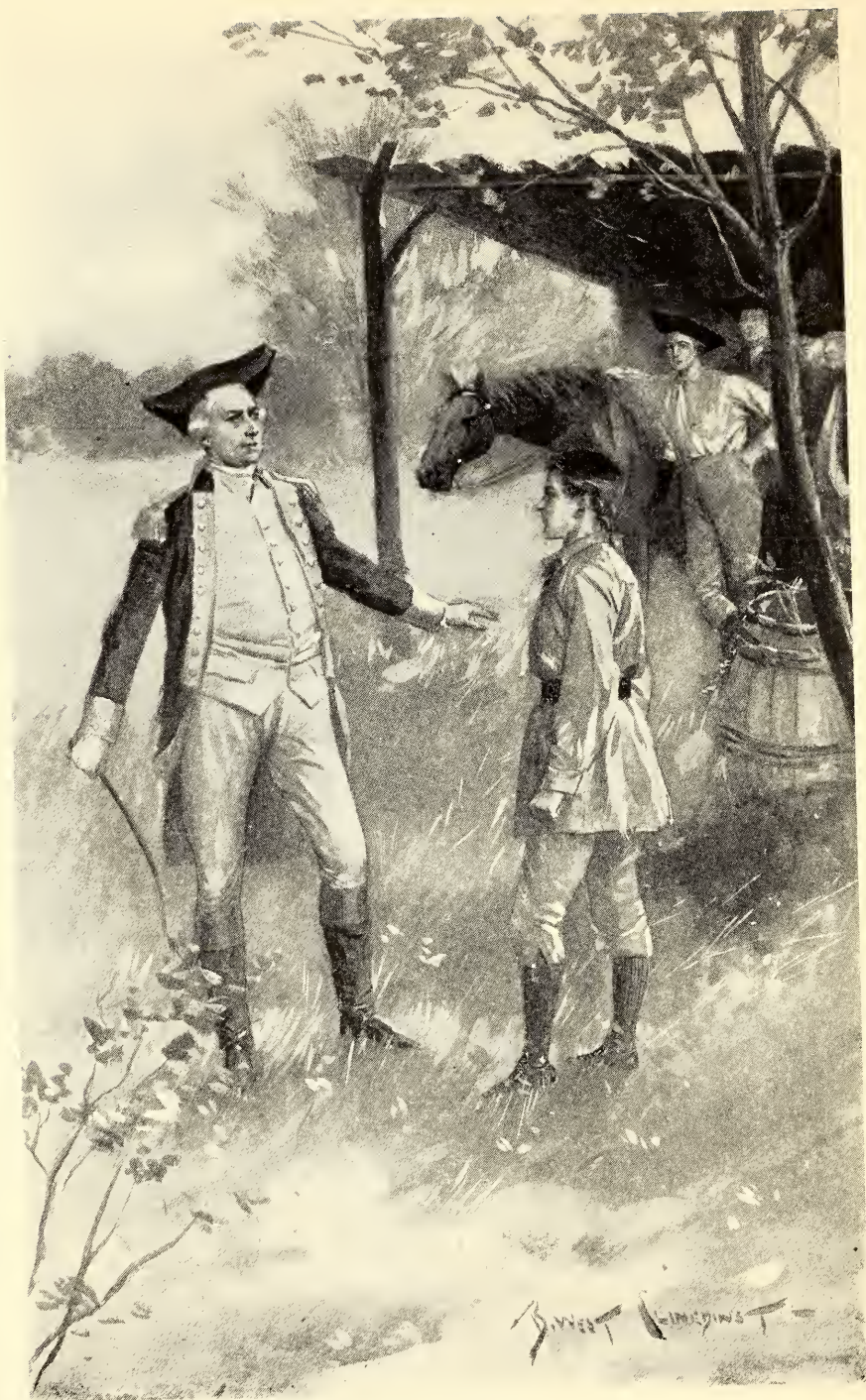
"I'm a thief? You young mutineer! Orderly, bring a file of men and a cowhide. Now, youngster, mount that horse!"

"I'm ordered not to delay here a moment," said Vine firmly. "That gray isn't fit to ride as I've got to ride. I won't ride him!"

A broad-shouldered, red-faced man was the colonel, and he may have been a good soldier, but he was evidently of a violent temper. He sprang to the stable wall and took down a heavy whip.

"Take that! Saddle and mount!" he shouted, bringing the whip down over Vine's shoulders. "Saddle that gray!"

Vine did not stir a step, although the lash stung



“Shoot!” said Vine, not flinching a hair.

him severely. He clutched his carbine hard, but he knew that actual resistance was a serious crime under military law, and he only stood still.

Again and again the lash fell.

"You may kill me," he said, "but you shall not steal my horse."

The colonel swore and almost raved, and he plied the whip pitilessly, but in vain.

"Tie him up!" he commanded. "Afterward you will put him in irons and throw him into the ca-boose."

There was no disobeying him for the regular soldiers, but Vine said:

"I'm not an enlisted man. I'm not under your orders. I am an express rider for the commander in chief. I'm ordered to report to President Hancock."

"Mount that gray, then!"

Others had saddled and bridled him, but not with Vine's own equipment. He stood as still as ever.

"Mount, or I'll have you shot!" said the colonel sternly.

"Shoot!" said Vine, not flinching a hair, and looking the angry tyrant steadily in the face.

Other officers had now arrived, and one of them expostulated with his commander, only to be told:

"Silence, sir, or I'll put you under arrest. It isn't

for a boy like him to say what horse he'll take.—Now, you, will you mount and ride?"

"No!" said Vine. "I'll die right here. If you stop Washington's dispatches to Congress you're worse than all the Tories between here and Philadelphia. You ought to be hung!"

"Tie him to that post!" commanded the colonel. "I'll have him shot for mutiny."

Another military duty had at that moment called upon him, and he could only wait long enough to see Vine bound to one of the uprights of the shed.

"I'll have him flayed with a cat o' nine tails first!" said his suddenly made enemy. "Orderly, bring out that black of his. I'll ride him on parade this evening."

There was no stable door, and from where Vine stood writhing with pain and rage and mortification he could see his own horse, that he loved like a brother, led out and fastened among others to one of a line of hitching posts.

"This is the way they pay a fellow for serving his country, is it?" he said to himself. "Anyhow, I won't yield. Not if I die for it!"

Nevertheless, there was Turk within twenty paces of him, and in less than a minute he had turned around and neighed, as if he were saying:

“There’s Vine! I’m glad to see him. Vine, why don’t you come? Vine!”

Vine could not come, but Turk was always an uncertain horse to hitch, and his halter may have been a weak one. At all events, he reared, strained backward, the halter snapped, and he was free to come in for a talk with his friend. Vine was too angry to cry. Besides, he was now a soldier, and he had learned lessons of endurance from what he had seen in the camps on Harlem Heights among the ragged, half-starved soldiers and the sick and wounded men.

“I wish I could balk like Turk!” he exclaimed aloud. “How these cords hurt me! There! My right hand is loose. I can get out my knife.”

It was another kind of mutiny to do so, and then to cut himself loose, but he did it. He was smarting from head to foot, but he was not at all disabled.

“Now, Turk!” he whispered. “There’s nobody looking.”

They were, indeed, all alone for that brief moment. The guard of the long stable shed was patrolling toward the other end of it. On went Turk’s own saddle and bridle, the holsters and blanket and saddlebags. Vine had already a wallet with some cold beef and hard crackers in it.

“The pistols!” he said, opening the holsters. “Hullo!”

His own very plain pair had been removed by the new owner, the colonel, and in place of them were two elegant, costly silver-mounted weapons, which may have been "won" somewhat as Turk was to have been, but that now were buckled up again, to stay and to go with those holsters.

"I'm all ready," said Vine. "The sentry has passed again. His back is this way. Turk, steady!"

There was not much "steady" in Turk's manner of going, but he was halfway to the great southern gate of Fort Lee before anybody knew he was out of the stable. It was too late then, for Vine had his written pass in his hand, and held it out to the officer of the guard at the gate.

"I'm ordered to make haste," he said as coolly as he could, "but they tell me I'm sure to be shot!"

"The chances are three to one that you will," said the officer. "Get through if you can. Pass!"

On dashed Turk, and he was out of sight down the road at the very moment when an excited corporal strode up to the colonel on the other side of the fort to tell him:

"That young mutineer untied himself, sir. He stole his own hoss, too, and rid away like lightnin'!"

Then there was a storm worse than the first, but the colonel was, after all, only telling his superior, Gen-

eral Greene, standing by him, precisely what he had done.

“You tied up General Washington’s express and took away his horse?” said the general. “I shall report you, sir.—No! Halt there! Not a man must follow him! He has done his duty.”

So he had, but he had been terribly flogged for doing it, and he rode away burning with a sense of injustice.

“I guess I know why some of the men deserted,” he said. “Father said so. A man’s got to love his country a great deal if he’s to be starved and frozen and go naked, and then be whipped like a brute.”

He might have added “by a brute,” but the colonel was not likely to suffer any actual punishment for so small a matter, especially as the dispatches had not actually been delayed. He felt that he had been fined something an hour later when he could again get to the stables.

“Stole my horse,” he growled. “Best pair of pistols I ever saw. New bridle and saddle and fixings. My new spyglass was buckled to the holsters. Best glass!”

All had seemed to him to be his own property, because, as appeared from what he said, he had “taken them,” and they were his by what he called “the laws of war.” If there were any such laws, perhaps Vine’s

right to all he rode away with was at least as good as the colonel's.

His papers only needed showing at post after post to prevent his being hindered. He did not know, however, but what he might be followed by some emissary of the colonel, and he let Turk have his own way on the long reaches of road between one picket and another until he was fairly out in the open country.

"Now," he exclaimed, "all the garrison of Fort Lee can't catch me! But I must look out for British and Hessians and Tories. I shall be awfully stiff and sore, though, with these whiplash cuts."

If they had been wounds received in battle he would not have minded it, but there was a keen sense of degradation attached to the idea of a flogging. It hurt him worse than did any of the cuts.

Before long, however, he pulled Turk to a standstill, that he might take another look at those beautiful pistols.

"Fit for a general!" he said, taking them out and looking at them. "What's that in the other case? Spy-glass! Hurrah! Just what I wanted. Just the thing for such a trip as this is. Well, the colonel's going to pay something for trying to steal Turk, but I don't want to fall into his hands again."

That was something to think of if he was ever to come back with dispatches.

“I won’t bring Turk where he can get him,” said Vine. “Anyhow, I don’t feel so much afraid about Tories this time. I can dodge ’em.”

That meant that he was now no longer a green hand. This was not his first trip across country. He was a kind of veteran—an old soldier who had been in a battle and who had even captured a flag. He was willing, nevertheless, to take the advice given him and not go by way of Irwin’s Hollow.

“It’s just the place where they’d know me and stop me,” he said. “Besides, I don’t want to see mother till I get over this flogging. And I hate to tell Jessie Cameron her father’s killed. I s’pose I’ll have to.”

He had very little idea how closely his old Tory neighbors, including his uncle Bob Van Tine, were watching for him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SUSQUEHANNOCK WIGWAM.

“OT!”

It was a very cool day late in September, but there, in the middle of the south road leading to Irwin's Hollow, stood Indian John, holding up his gun by the middle to bar the way.

Both horse and rider knew him, for they obeyed him instantly.

“Hurrah! You're just the fellow I wanted to see. How are things at the Hollow? I hardly knew if 'twas safe to ride in.”

“Vi 'top talk. Get into woods right away. Bob heap fool. Got Tory at house. Not let him know Vi come.”

Not a rod farther would he let his young friend go along that road. He would not even answer questions until he had led Turk through a gap in the fence on the side toward the high, rugged range of hills easterly from the Hollow, and on they went until they were

hidden under the forest trees. There he halted and remarked:

“John heap Tory now. 'Tay in hill all while. Kill redcoat. Kill Hess'n. Kill Seneca. Want kill old King Jaw. 'Calp him some day. Heap mad. Vi hear.”

He gave a very clear account of the condition of affairs in the Hollow, including the fact that he was himself now a kind of outlaw so far as King George's servants were concerned. For so slight a matter as the shooting of the lieutenant and the Hessian at the Irwin doorstep he was to be shot on sight by anybody daring to try that not very safe experiment.

“Tory shoot Vi,” he said. “Take away 'patches. Now come see wigwam.”

It was quite plain that Vine's arrival was not to be made public, but he gave his Indian friend a full account of his adventures since they parted. His second trip to Philadelphia had been almost uneventful, so cautiously and swiftly had he made his way from Fort Lee to the Delaware River. He had delivered his dispatches, but no return errand had been given him. Other hands were carrying all that was to be sent, and he was at liberty to visit his home. After all, he was not yet an enlisted “Continental,” and he was a very inexperienced patriot to be trusted with affairs of national importance. It happened once, but prudent men

like Hancock were not willing to run such a risk again right away.

"John sorry for Dave," he said to Vine. "Wife cry a heap. Girl cry. Red-head medicine squaw glad see boy."

She was not to see him at once, however, for he was led away, mile after mile, all the while nearer home, but through parts of the forest that he had not known well until then.

"I thought I'd hunted all through these hills," he said, "but this beats me. It takes an Indian!"

He said that again when they came to the end of their march through the woods. It was in a deep ravine, walled on either side by broken ledges of granite. A little stream, a mere rill, trickled among the boulders and fragments at the bottom of the ravine. Nearly half way up on one side was a house, and its walls were of solid stone. It was the solidest kind of "wigwam." Huge masses of rocks had tumbled down upon a broad level in such positions that it had required no great amount of toil to roof over the spaces between them. One great crevice served capitably for a chimney, with a natural fireplace at the bottom.

"Pow-a-hi-tun-ka own house," said the Susquehannock proudly.

A closer examination convinced Vine that this had

been a "house" for a very long time—perhaps before any white men had appeared in New Jersey. It had been improved from year to year, until now it was as comfortable as any log house he knew of, but at twenty paces from its entrance it might be entirely unsuspected.

"Tory no find house," said John. "Keep hoss in woods. Vi see?"

"I declare!" exclaimed Vine. "What heaps of corn and potatoes! Pumpkins, winter squashes, apples, pears, bacon, hams! Where did you get 'em all?"

"Old chief heap Tory," explained John. "Go see 'em. Tell 'em what do."

The tribe of Susquehannocks had indeed disappeared, all but one old warrior, and he seemed disposed to adopt and bring in a new tribe of revolutionary patriots beginning with Vine. He was immensely pleased at having caught him in the road and brought him there, saving him from capture by his enemies in the Hollow. He now took even greater delight, after hitching Turk under a pretty good shelter with his own pony, in guiding his "young brave" down through the forest. They went by a tolerably plain path after it was once learned, and Vine was astonished to find that John's secret residence was little more than a mile from the Hollow. Probably it was all the safer because it's owner was generally somewhere else, and never kindled a fire there in

the daytime. Nobody ever went among those ledges, especially after dark.

"Ugh!" said John as he and Vine came out at the edge of the yet ungathered corn near the house. "John go in. Vi wait."

That was prudent, and the Indian went alone to the back door. It was open, and he walked in, for he had never learned the white man's way of knocking.

Vine had not promised to "wait," and he had not succeeded in suppressing his eager haste to see his mother.

From the corn to the nearest fence seemed safe. Along the fence, stooping low and taking advantage of clumps of weeds, could not expose him. He had passed the orchard, and had actually reached the rear of the smokehouse when he heard his mother's voice screaming:

"Robert! Robert Van Tine! You shall not take him! Not in my house!"

"Yes, I will, and hang him, too!"

"That's Uncle Bob," thought Vine as he sprang forward, carbine in hand.

Loud and shrill rang the warwhoop of the Susquehannock, but it came from within the house, and was instantly followed by the crack of his rifle, while a rattle of answering shots sounded from somewhere

near the gate, and with them was heard Job Rounds declaring:

“Vine’s in there. I saw him in the road with Indian John.”

“The traitor!” gasped Vine as he darted through the house.

“O Vine!” said his mother. “Job Rounds told them. I’d have got the door shut but for him.”

“Oh, don’t!” screeched Job himself in the doorway as Vine’s carbine came up and looked him in the face. “Don’t! You’ll hev to sur-ren—— Oh!” and over he tumbled down the low doorstep, keeling almost heels over head to get out of line of that gun.

“Don’t shoot!” called out the squire. “Give right up, Vine. We won’t hurt you. All we want is your papers.”

“Vi no shoot!” said John. “Keep bullet in gun. ’Care ’em.”

The squire himself was dodging, and the small squad of men in the road were trying to load in a hurry, for all their guns were empty. Some had run to the nearest cover, while the only uniformed soldier among them lay flat in the dust. John may have considered him a Seneca.

Bang! went the door, and Mrs. Irwin herself put the bar in the hooks before she turned to hug Vine.

Just before she reached him he shouted through the window:

"I don't want to shoot you, Uncle Bob, nor any of the Hollow men, but I'll have to if you don't go. The British have been whipped again. I'm home to stay. Didn't bring any papers. Dave Cameron was killed the day we beat the redcoats. We're going to clean out every Tory in Irwin's Hollow. Hurrah for General Washington!"

He named other men from the neighborhood who were killed or wounded. He believed the battle of Harlem Heights a bigger affair than it was, but it put a damper on the squire and his Tories to hear of it as a victory for the Continentals.

"O Vine!" sobbed his mother. "I'm so sorry for Jessie and her mother. Elsie Cameron's a brave woman, but she did love Dave so. I'm thankful for you and your father! O Vine! were you both in the battle?"

"Side by side, mother," but he could say no more, for the momentary silence outside was broken by the squire:

"Indian John'll have to suffer if 'twas only for shooting that reg'lar out in the road. I don't want to hurt him or you, but you can't live in this Hollow."

"Bob 'top talk," said the Indian. "Shut up mouth! Go home. Heap fool. All redcoat lose 'calp. 'Calp

Hess'n, too. John heap Tory. Shoot Bob. Vi shoot Job. Too much tongue."

Job was not just then within range, for he was creeping along the fence very snakily, going much faster than any one would have supposed he could.

"I'll shoot the first man that comes through the gate," said Vine. "I don't care who he is."

His carbine rested on the window sill as he spoke, and not a Tory in the road moved toward the gate. On the contrary, they seemed to believe their pieces could be loaded as well somewhere else, for every man of them began to walk toward the village. The squire was the last to go, but even he had not enough of confidence in John's "Tory" principles to stand still while the Susquehannock pointed a gun at him. How did he know that it was the same rifle and empty?

"Whoop!" It was a loud one, and the squire went faster as he saw John come out through the door.

"He's a devil!" exclaimed the squire. "Vine's aiming at me. Two to one. They're all running. Who knows how many more are with them? I'll catch John some other time."

Just then John's immediate purpose was not Tory killing. All he came out for was the British soldier's gun and ammunition and every other article of value about him. After all, however, that poor fellow's fate

was precisely like that of scores of emissaries of General Howe and other British commanders sent out to stir up and organize the Tories.

Mrs. Irwin and Vine talked fast, for he was as eager to know about matters in the Hollow as she was to hear about her husband and the army.

She had paused to look at him with eyes full of love and pride, when they were interrupted. They had hardly heard the hurrying feet that now came in.

“O Vine! Father! Did you see him? Was he killed?”

“Vine, tell me about Davie! I met the squire on the road. Tell me all, all!”

Mrs. Cameron had put her hands on his shoulders, and her eyes were streaming, but Mrs. Irwin took Jessie right into her arms to say:

“O Jessie! your father and Vine and his father were side by side——”

“When Davie fell?” cried Mrs. Cameron. “Oh, the day! But it’s not that. My man died for his faith like his forefathers and mine.—Up, Vine! The Tories have disarmed the Whigs. Not one in the Hollow has a gun. Even Walter Baker, they took his rifle. If you’d dare, noo. Polly told you of the muskets in the garret——”

"Ugh! Whoop!" came suddenly from Indian John, but she continued:

"Squire Van Tine was just setting out for Trenton when Job came to tell him. He started again. He won't be there."

"We will, then!" said Vine. "Come, John."

"Teal heap gun! Ugh!" grunted John.

"Elsie," said Mrs. Irwin, "you and Jessie stay here with me."

"Never!" she responded, almost fiercely. "Not for a' the goold! For Davie's sake, we'll arm the men that are left. I'll be there."

"I'll go with you," said Mrs. Irwin, and in a moment the house was empty, for Vine and the red man were already away out in the fields on a run.

The women walked down the road, and they were crying as they went.

Not many minutes later Walter Baker turned from his forge to exclaim:

"Vine Irwin! You here? Why, the Tories'll shoot you!"

"No, they won't," replied Vine, as if he were giving orders. "That redcoat lies dead in the road in front of our house. Take that wagon out there and drive me and John to Uncle Bob's. We'll lie down in it. Drive through to the back of the house."

"There's a Tory sentry in front," said Baker.

"We won't kill him unless it's necessary."

"Vi shut mouth. Old chief 'peak Tory at Bob house."

A team hitched near the shop was instantly unhitched. Its Tory owner was in the tavern with others like him, and half a dozen muskets with bayonets were stacked in front of it soldier fashion.

Swift feet came along the road at that very minute.

"Baker," said Vine, "hold your team. Now, John!"

"Ugh!" said the Indian. "Squaw help!"

Mrs. Cameron had understood Vine's pointing finger, but it was Jessie's hand that was first to help Vine unstack those muskets. In an instant they were in the wagon. Off it started, and it seemed then as if Walter Baker were only driving a party of women visitors to the Van Tine place. As for the men in the tavern, they did not so much as know that they were disarmed. Halfway, as the wagon went, was the house of a trusty Whig, and there two guns were left, with Vine's command:

"March to Van Tine's!"

Another man was armed in the road to wait for that pair, and then the wagon drove in at the squire's gate, to be met by the sentry:

"Halt! Baker, none of your kind can drive in here."

"We'll get down, then, and go in," said Mrs. Cameron. "Hoot, man, dinna ye ken the redcoats are beaten again? What'll ye say noo?"

She sprang to the ground, followed by Jessie with a wildcat jump, and in a second more by Mrs. Irwin. The sentry was himself eager for news, and those three closed around him. Out rang the warwhoop of the Susquehannock, and his spring was that of a panther, but Mrs. Cameron grasped the Tory's musket. He was a strong man and brave enough, but Vine's carbine from the wagon stared him in the face, his own gun was "held up," and within three steps of him was John with his long knife out.

"Tory drop gun!" he shouted. "No kill him. Good friend if he no fool. Put down gun!"

There was nothing else to do, and he surrendered, saying:

"I'm kind o' sorry 'bout Dave, Mrs. Cameron. He went there, though. Soldiers will get killed."

"'Top mouth," said John. "Pretty good Tory. No 'calp him. Tie hand."

So he did, and then tied the man to a tree in a very friendly but extremely rapid fashion, while all the others poured into the house.

“Quick!” shouted Polly Van Tine from the head of the stairs. “I know what you came for. Right up here! All the guns of the new Tory company.”

Polly even went up the steeper stairs of the garret without any crutches, and when Jessie got there she was ready to say:

“Take ’em! Carry two at a time. Take a box of cartridges. I’m so sorry about your father.—Vine, did we beat ’em this time? Hurrah! All our men must have guns.”

Walter Baker came up, but Indian John did not. He was out at the gate, rifle in hand, until the three men Vine had armed came along, bringing a fourth with them. Jessie and her cartridges were just in time, and now a pretty strong squad of Whigs held the gate. The squad of Tories at the tavern was out, indeed, and all the village knew what had happened.

Every boy that heard set out at once for Van Tine’s, and the disarmed Tories came also, sulkily enough.

It was pretty heavy work lugging those things downstairs, but there was no one in the house to hinder. It was curious, too, when Vine came out with his first load how they all spoke to him as if he were a kind of commissioned officer.

“All we needed,” said one man, “was somebody to lead off, but we held still till they took our guns away.

We had no cattridges either, nor bay'nets. We didn't know what to do."

"Heap shoot!" growled John. "'Tick bay'net into King Jaw. 'Calp him."

His personal bitterness seemed to be somehow concentrating upon the monarch of Great Britain. Next to him, upon Senecas and Hessians, while he had as yet a half-neighborly feeling for mere Tories. He was one himself unless they should fight him or try to burn his house.

The squad of Tories from the tavern was not permitted to approach too near. A warning shot halted them as soon as they were within range.

"Vine Irwin's home again," they said. "We ought to have kep' a better guard. He'll shoot, he will."

Another shot, a bullet whizzing over their heads, sent them to the right about, and Vine and his friends finished their job in peace. It was really Mrs. Cameron's work, and it seemed to do her a world of good.

Polly did not come downstairs till the last ounce of that lot of army goods had been delivered.

"I never lifted so much in all my life," she said, "and I don't care how lame it makes me. But our men have the guns and the swords, too."

Equally important was the really liberal supply of loose powder and other ammunition. The village boys

took that downstairs a box at a time, and it was well they came, for there was danger ahead.


“Now!” shouted Vine. “Men, into the wagon! We must arm every Whig in the Hollow and disarm every Tory.”

“’Calp Hess’n,” added John, and with a ringing cheer of triumph the wagonload rolled away, leaving all the women behind to talk about Vine’s news from the war and to mourn over the awful troubles that had come upon the Jersey people.

Within half an hour a score of well-armed patriots ready for fight were drawn up at the blacksmith shop. Every house in the village had been searched, and the one wagon had become three, going in different directions gun collecting, to turn the tables utterly against the Tories, up and down the valley.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FORAGING PARTY.

“INE will have to answer for it yet,” remarked Squire Van Tine to his wife in the kitchen doorway.

He had been talking somewhat wrathfully, but he was calmer now, for he was standing between her and the wellhouse, and he was looking toward his barns and the healthy-looking ricks grouped around them. He shortly added:

“I will say we never had such crops since the Hollow was settled as we’ve had this year. Best hay, wheat, orchard crops, potatoes, and the prices are going to be good, too.”

“So many are in the army and can’t gather what they have,” she said. “The Irwins have gotten theirs all in.”

“I s’pose they have,” he replied, “but I can’t guess what they’ve done with it. They couldn’t ha’ sent it to the rebel army. How all the Whigs do count on Vi! Mere boy!”

“He doesn’t look nor act like a boy,” she said. “We needn’t complain. He hasn’t let a Tory get hurt. Not even Job Rounds, that told on him.”

“I guess that was Polly’s work,” returned the squire. “They were going to string up Job, but Polly wouldn’t let ’em. She went to see Vine about it.”

That had been true, and her father was not at all sorry that the women of his household had so much influence with the young leader whose followers now possessed all the guns and powder and ball to be found for more than a dozen miles up and down the Nippitink Creek.

About the crops? There were the abundant fruits of Squire Van Tine’s broad acres. His barns and cellars were full, and his horses and horned cattle and his hogs had a well-fed, prosperous, contented look, as if the war had not touched them, or at least as if they belonged to the winning side. The varied products of the Irwin farm were not, as the squire said, so plainly in sight.

The days immediately following the seizure of the arms at the Van Tine place had been quiet days. Perhaps they might have been called subdued days. The squire himself came back from his trip to Trenton to be greatly surprised. He was angry, too, but he did not feel so badly as might have been expected. A very unpleasant responsibility had been taken off his hands,

for there was now no "Tory company" in that neighborhood. As Indian John told him:

"Bob heap mad! Lose gun for King Jaw! Ugh! Good! 'Tay home now. Keep 'calp."

Mrs. Van Tine took that view of the matter, and, after all, the armies and the war were not yet very near them.

The Susquehannock was not getting ready for peace, however. He and Vine made trip after trip, leading well-packed horses from the Irwin place to the stone wigwam in the ravine. John himself was believed by Vine to have made a number of other trips here and there by night, and there were even complaints from some of the Tory farmers concerning a kind of thinning out of the contents of their smokehouses. If, however, anything was missing, they might or might not believe his statement:

"John heap Tory. King Jaw 'teal pork. Heap pig. Ugh! John 'calp him. Hess'n 'teal ham."

He came and went without any fear of being called to account, for during several weeks there were no armed enemies of his to be encountered. Such news as came from the north was somewhat ragged and untrustworthy. It was said that battles had taken place away up in Westchester County, New York. Others were reported from the far south. There were said to be

British war ships in Delaware Bay. Nobody knew exactly what was going on, and Irwin's Hollow was a very secluded place.

Mrs. Cameron was a wonderful woman. Vine found time to go and help her, and so did her other neighbors, but they were astonished to find how much hard farmwork and crop gathering she had done with her own hands.

"And Jessie, too," she said. "The girl's worth more than some men. Davie'd want me to have things well fixed for winter. Thank God, there'll be na winter where he is, nor ony war! Nor ony king but ane that's King of us a'."

She did not lose heart or hope for a moment. Not even when, with the November frosts, pretty sure tidings arrived that the battle of White Plains had gone against Washington, and that his army was almost in a starving condition.

"There'll anither army coom," she said, "if that ane's gane. There'll never again be a British croon ower the American people."

Indian John did not perform any great amount of actual farmwork. Even hoeing up potatoes was a duty which belonged to white men and to squaws rather than to a red warrior. Toward the end of October he suddenly disappeared, leaving Vine under a vague impres-

sion that the last of the Susquehannocks had gone on an errand of inquiry among the camp fires of his ancient foes, the Iroquois, or the Senecas in particular.

The November weeks dragged by in an increasing cold. Old people said it was long since such a cold snap had come so early, or that heavy ice had formed in the Delaware before midwinter.

It was about the noon of a crisp and biting day that Walter Baker put down one of Turk's hind feet, upon which he had been very neatly fitting a new shoe. The black racer turned his head and uttered a small, inquiring neigh, which meant:

"Is that job completed, Walt?"

Then he turned toward the door and spoke more loudly, for another horse had been halted almost in the doorway.

"Baker!"

"Vine!" exclaimed the blacksmith. "It's Stuart! —Hullo, Stuart!"

But their former visitor and guest sprang lightly to the ground, for he was neither sick nor wounded this time. Nevertheless, he did not respond brightly or cheerfully to their cordial words of welcome as they came forward.

Turk came with them and stood with his head over Vine's shoulder, as if listening for news from the army.

"No Tories to trouble you now," was almost the first thing Vine told him. "The Whigs have taken the whole Hollow."

"Who's head man?" asked Stuart. "I must see him at once."

"Guess it's Captain Irwin, right before you," half laughed the blacksmith. "But tell us what's up."

"Everything's down," said Stuart gloomily. "Tell me how it is here."

Baker rapidly explained the seizure of the arms and the suppression of the Tories, but he could hardly wait, for he saw there was something important next to come.

"You can help, then," said Stuart. "Vine, the British stormed Fort Washington. We've abandoned Fort Lee. Our army is in full retreat for the Delaware. We lost our guns, stores, provisions. The general sent me and a lot more on in advance to collect all we can, or the men'll die of famine on the march——"

"They shall have all we can gather," said Vine, but his heart was beating heavily, and he could hardly breathe as he asked: "My father? First New Jersey? He was in the fort. Do you know about him? Killed?"

"Part of Washington's old army is up in Westchester. Part is in the forts away up the Hudson. Part is with him, being chased across the Jerseys. We lost

three thousand in Fort Washington. The Hessians murdered scores and scores of them after they surrendered. Bay'neted them. I don't know if the First New Jersey was there. If it was, it's gone—dead, wounded, or prisoners."

"I'm ready!" shouted Vine. "I've a team and a wagon."

"Ye can have Davie Cameron's team," sounded ringingly behind them. "Jessie and I'll gang hame and load up the wagon. It's na the day to hold back. We must gie them a' we've left, and our lives also. Aye!—Coom, Jessie!—Walter Baker, load up.—Vine, tak' ony man's goods for the men that are holding out!"

"I'll do that very thing!" said Vine.—"Baker, wagons, horses, provisions!—Stuart, you come with me.—Turk!"

Turk's manner told how plainly he felt the excitement that spoke in the voices around him. He was already rubbing his saddle against Vine, as if to bid him mount and ride. It was heavy news to carry and hard news to tell. From house to house rode Vine to tell it, however, and to call for contributions. At some houses the hearers' faces brightened, and they said they had nothing to give. At others, the leaden discouragement of defeat had almost as bad an effect, and he was told:

"It's of no use, Vine. We're beaten. We don't

wish to anger the British now they're coming right here. All the Tories would tell if we gave you anything."

"I shall load every wagon, anyhow," was at last his angry answer, and he was as plainly told:

"Whoever else isn't shot or hung, you will be soon as they get here."

It was swift work, but eight large wagons he did succeed in loading, including his own, before he met his mother face to face.

"O Vine!" she said; "your father?"

"Don't speak, mother. I'm afraid he was in the fort. It was a massacre. I'll take this train to the troops and I'll hurry back. I shall know more, then."

"Do your duty!" she sobbed, with her arms around his neck. "You might find your own father among the starving men. Go, feed them. God keep you! You're all I have now."

"You don't know that yet, mother. I sent word to Uncle Bob's. We'll get some salt beef there as we go by."

"He won't give you a thing!" she said.

She was very nearly correct. Vine sprang upon Turk and rode away at the head of his train of wagons. Other patriots as sincere as he and almost as heavy-hearted were driving the teams, and behind these, as

the wheels rumbled over the frozen road, came a number of horned cattle, driven by a couple of armed Whigs on horseback, while every now and then a discontented bellow answered the shouts of the men.

Squire Van Tine's gate was reached speedily, and there he stood, red-faced and angry, ready to respond to Vine's demand for contributions:

"Not a pound, you young rebel! Your time o' reckoning's close at hand. The King's troops are coming."

"Bob heap mad!" called out a well-known voice in the road beyond. "Vi no mind him. Come along, Vi. No 'top. Pow-a-hi-tun-ka Tory! 'Calp King Jaw. Come!"

"Come on, boys!" shouted Vine. "The wagons are pretty well loaded now. Let Uncle Bob go for this time."

There were growls of wrath, and not a few hot words hurled at the squire, but no harm was done him.

"Back again, are you?" said Vine to the grim-looking Susquehannock. "Where have you been?"

"Vi no talk," said John, turning to go on in advance. "Old chief go to York. Three Seneca. Two Hess'n. One redcoat. Look at King Jaw. Shoot at him once. No hit him. See him again, 'calp him!"

Something further was now in the wind, and Vine

was to guess what scarlet-coated, gold-laced officer of the British army might have been mistaken by the prowling red wolf for the King of England.

Only a little farther down the road a part of John's mystery was solved. It was at the bars of Squire Van Tine's ample pasture lot. The grass was all gone, of course, but his fine herd of fat cattle still used it for a range. Not all of them were in sight, but a full score were coming toward the bars. Not of their own accord, for they had no patriotism whatever, but behind them, urging them, were Mrs. Van Tine and Polly and two of the village boys who had brought them the news. Curiously enough, Polly was among the van of the unwilling herd, pounding a fat ox with a crutch, and she was the first to call out:

"Vine, take them! I wish our men had them all! Here's all we could gather."

"God bless you, Vine Irwin!" shouted Mrs. Van Tine. "If Robert won't give anything, I will. It's the best I can do now, but you may come back for more."

"Thank you, Aunt Sally," shouted back Vine. "They'll have something to eat now. I don't believe father's killed. Perhaps he wasn't in the fort when the British took it. If he was killed, I'll take his place."

“Hurrah for Captain Irwin!” called out one of the men. “We’re with him!”

“Such a boy, too!” murmured his aunt, driving the cattle through the gap. “I wish I had a son to send.”

Polly’s face was rosy with frost and exertion when Stuart leaned in his saddle to tell her how much good her gift and her mother’s would do the starving men, but she hardly had time to answer him, and the provision train moved on.

“We shall meet them before midnight,” said Stuart to Vine. “Two of Washington’s divisions came by this way. The army had to move by different roads, but the whole force will gather at the Delaware. Where’s that Indian?”

“Gone ahead,” replied Vine. “Best kind of scout. Somebody may stir up the Tories. We must be ready to fight.”

“To the death!” said Stuart. “They wouldn’t spare a man of us just now. They’re bayoneting our men wherever they can find them.”

Very terrible were some of the stories he had to tell, and he believed that some of the worst things were not known because there was no living soul left to report them as they were.

The shadows come early at the beginning of winter,

but there were only short halts made even when the darkness grew deep and a light snow began to fall.

"Glad it isn't colder," said Vine. "We must make a long, long push."

So they did, and it was really cold enough to chill anything but the most warm-hearted patriotism late in the long, toilsome evening when Stuart suddenly remarked to Vine:

"Hark! Horse hoofs ahead! Ready!"

"Only one," said Vine. "Let him come."

"Shoot if it's an enemy," said Stuart. "I believe we wouldn't have got as far as this if we'd been expected."

"There!" exclaimed Vine. "All right. Here he comes, mounted."

The shrill whoop that greeted them was the war whoop of the tribe of Susquehannocks, and all that was left of them came on at a gallop.

"Heap army camp!" he shouted. "Vi drive on. Ugh! Heap eat."

"Where'd you get your horse?" asked Vine. "Is it our army?"

"One more Hess'n," responded John. "No Seneca. Redcoat run. Tory run. John take hoss. Take gun. No 'calp 'em."

It seemed to be a thing to apologize for, but he evi-

dently had ideas about scalp taking that he did not explain. Senecas, always; others, not so much a matter of Susquehannock duty.

Nevertheless, his tidings proved how closely General Howe's squads of light horse were following the track of Washington's retreat. Narrow, indeed, had been his several successive escapes from losing all that was left of his army.

Darker, darker, and the snow was falling faster, but before long, as Vine rode out on the brow of a hill, he could see the dim glimmer of many lights in the valley below.

"Camp fires!" he shouted. "Come on, boys! Yonder are our fellows. Oh, but I'm glad we came!"

There they were, up and down the roads and in the fields, shivering around the fires, without tents, almost without cooking utensils, and by far the greater part of them able to answer, as did the first party Vine rode up to:

"Not a mouthful since yesterday. Some of us not for two days and more."

Ahead of Vine still rode the Susquehannock, and it was his voice that responded to a deep-toned "Who comes there?" that came to them out of the white veil of the falling snow beyond.

"That's General Washington," said Stuart in a low

voice. "He rides around among the men all the while."

"Ugh!" was the prompt response of Indian John. "Cap'n Irwin! Beef. Bacon. Potatoes. Shoot Hess'n. 'Calp old King Jaw! Whoop!"

"Thank God!" said the general reverently. "We get help when we least expected it."

There were more beef cattle in Vine's "command" than had walked out of Irwin's Hollow with him, and he had performed something of a military feat more daring than he knew of, for the Tories were up in all directions. All he had brought was not much per man, divided among so many, but it was new life to hundreds, and would enable the brave fellows to march again on the morrow. He felt a great quiver of pride, very hot, go all over him when he reined in Turk before the commander in chief, to hear him say:

"Thank you, Captain Irwin. This is the second great service you have rendered your country."

"Were the First New Jersey all killed at Fort Washington?" sprang to Vine's lips, because it was the one question his brain was burning with.

"No, Irwin," said the general. "Part of them are at West Point."

"It's our own regiment," said Vine. "My father is Sergeant Irwin."

“Captain of his company now, sir,” said an officer near Washington. “At West Point. Wounded. Brave fellow.”


“Like father, like son,” muttered the general himself, but he added in a louder tone: “Rest your men and your teams, Irwin. Go home. Plan to give us more supplies when you can. Provisions are more important than more men just now. The commissary will take an account.”

“Ugh! No!” interrupted Indian John. “No ’count. Hollow men give. Old Chief Washington take. Cap’n Irwin go home for Tory cattle. ’Kin ’em! ’Calp em. ’Calp King Jaw!”

“We wish we had more to give, sir,” was all Vine could think of. “I’ll get all I can, anyhow. Indian John is right.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE TORIES AND THEIR FRIENDS.

“TUART,” said Vine as the returning train drew near the Van Tine place, “it’s been a cold trip home, but I believe the storm’s been just the thing.”

“Kept the Tories quiet, eh?” said Stuart. “Well, the roads’ll be bad wheeling if the snow falls any deeper.”

“Plenty o’ sleds and easier hauling,” replied Vine, “but cattle won’t be able to travel well till after the roads are broken.”

“A drove o’ cattle can break its own road sometimes,” said the cavalryman, “but we’ll need a strong guard if we’re ever to get a train to the Delaware. I believe we’re followed now.”

“Vine Irwin,” shouted the squire from behind his own gate, “I’ll hold you accountable for every hoof of ’em. I’ll make you pay, too. We’ve heard from Howe’s army.”

“Vine,” called out Polly at her father’s side, “Job

Rounds went and carried the news of what you were doing. He came back sick of it, though. I don't know what he did there, but they tied him up and flogged him."

"Served him right!" shouted Stuart. "Hope he got it well laid on. Every Tory ought to be flogged. Even the British are getting sick of 'em."

"They'll teach you, anyhow——"

"Squire Van Tine," roared one of the teamsters, "it's time for you to shut up. Vine Irwin himself can't protect you much longer. He couldn't now if 'twasn't for your wife and daughter. If 'twasn't for them, we'd come and string you right up."

"Polly," said Vine, "get Uncle Bob into the house. He says too much."

"Ugh!" grunted Indian John. "Tie up Bob. Put a cob in he mouth. Ugh!"

"That's dark news, though," said Stuart. "Vine, it spoils our plans just now."

The young leader of the Hollow men made no reply. Things did indeed look dark. His father lying wounded in a famine camp among the New York mountains. His general defeated and retreating with a mere wreck of an army. The victorious enemy pouring down from the north to overrun all the Jerseys. And now they had been actually sent for to come and destroy Vine and his patriot neighbors.

"Boys," he shouted at the end of his minute of thinking, "take the teams home. They're dead tired out. Then bring out every man with his gun, and gather at Walter Baker's. We've got to fight for our lives this time."

"Hurrah for Captain Irwin!" came back from one of the men. "I just didn't know what to do. It's better to be all together and have a chance than it is to be bay'neted one at a time at our own houses."

"Whoop!" shouted the Susquehannock. "'Rah for Vi! Kill a heap!"

The valley was beginning to wear a wintry look, but it was not desolate, excepting to the eyes of men and women who looked at it through the disheartening news that was coming in from all directions. Vine reached his own home, to find Jessie and Mrs. Cameron with his mother waiting for him, but he only remained long enough to tell the story of his "foraging party," or rather his supply train.

"Oh," said Mrs. Cameron to her friend, "it's gude to ken your man's but wounded! But they camps are bad to get well in. You may see him yet."

"Elsie! Elsie!" replied Mrs. Irwin, "if I could be with him! I know about wounds like a surgeon. If I could send him some witch-hazel or some bark, or be sure he had lint and bandages. They say hundreds of the

wounded men die for lack of care. And how can they get well with nothing to eat and nothing to cover them? Tom is a strong, tough fellow——”

“But think of Vine!” almost interrupted Jessie eagerly. “The men say he’s as tough as hickory. He can tire out any of them. So can Turk. They seem to be on the go day and night.”

They were already going again. So was the day, and the settlers of Irwin’s Hollow dreaded the coming on of that night. The moon was not to rise early, and a kind of gloom came and spread itself over the fields and among the snow sheets in which all the evergreens had wrapped themselves.

Man after man, on foot or on horseback, came plodding through the snow to the ample, barnlike shelter of Baker’s shop.

Some of them proposed to build a fire in the road, but Vine objected.

“Not on this side of the bridge,” he said. “If there’s to be any, it’ll be on the other side. We won’t light it just yet.”

“No good to us,” said one of the men.

“You wait and see,” replied Vine. “We won’t have to wait long to know if they’re coming to-night. Hullo! Look! Do you see that?”

It had ceased snowing, and the sky was pretty clear.

Up and across it now as they looked streamed an increasing red light from some place far down the Nippitink.

“Smith’s house!” shouted more than one of the men, and another added, “Why, the Smiths are Tories.”

“The Hessians have come!” said Vine. “Stuart, ride down as far as Bob Van Tine’s. Warn them and come back. I must stay here.—Now, boys, a breast-work at the bridge. Leave just the wagon road open. Come on! Those old wagons, fence rails, anything you can get hold of.”

Away rode Stuart, but he was not the first to go, for Jessie Cameron herself was ahead of him, and beyond her, as if she were racing so swiftly in an effort to catch him, was the Susquehannock, running the tireless “lope” of the Indian runners.

Jessie passed him before many minutes, and as she went by she said:

“Come along, John. I can’t wait for you. I must run!”

The red light on the sky had not brought the first news to Squire Van Tine’s house that night. He had been well aware that a detachment of the King’s troops was to be sent, as he understood it, to protect the “loyalists” of Irwin’s Hollow, to overawe the Whigs, and to prevent the sending of any further supplies to the rebel

army. He expected his redcoated friends, and was prepared to extend cordial welcome and hospitality to those excellent gentlemen the officers of the British army.

Something of a shock, a slight one, had been felt by him when he heard of the severe treatment given to Job Rounds, but then he partly understood that Job had previously carried incorrect news or had failed to notify them in time concerning "Captain Irwin's" supply train. If he had been quicker, they said, they might have captured it, and poor Job had to suffer for inefficiency. He would probably do better next time for that flogging by the men he was serving. It was all the pay they gave him, and he had not been seen by anybody for several hours.

"There isn't a Whig house in that direction," remarked the squire, standing in his porch and looking down the road. "If Irwin's men are doing any mischief, our troops ought to hurry up."

"Father," said Polly at his side, "our men are all above the bridge. The Hessians burn anything. They don't care who it is half the time."

His face reddened, and then it turned ashen pale, for he had heard strange tales now and then, and he had refused to believe them.

"Where's your mother?" he asked then. "I'll see what she thinks."

"I'm going to pack her trunk and mine," exclaimed Polly. "I won't be here when those murderers come. I'd rather be out in the snow."

"Polly," he shouted, "I do believe that's the Smith place. Hullo, out there! Who are you? What's happened?"

"I'm Jim Smith," returned a husky voice. "The Hessians have murdered Joe, and they're burning the place. They took everything."

"Where's your wife?"

"In Trenton, thank God! I'm a Whig now, I am. I found a gun and got away. Hurrah for Congress! They're going to clean out the Hollow. It's a foraging party. Wagons. Murderers!"

"I'm here, Robert! I hitched the bay team to the big sleigh. The hands are starting the cattle. We may save something." It was his wife's voice.

"I don't see how," he groaned. "There goes the Davis place. It's a mile nearer. They wouldn't hurt us. I've stood out for the King."

"They're serving all alike," shouted Smith. "Sam Davis was as much a Tory as you are."

"Here he is," came like a reply out of the gloom behind him. "I saw the light o' your place and I took warning. Two sleigh loads full of us, but they're taking what's left. Did they burn your house?"

“Joe was bay’neted for trying to stop ’em,” replied his living brother. “It was an officer did it, too. I don’t half know how I got away. I’m about crazy.”

“So am I,” said Davis. “We can’t stop here. They’re coming. There isn’t any place. God help us!”

“Polly! Mrs. Van Tine! All of you! Come to the village. Vine and his men mean to fight ’em at the bridge.”

“Jessie, is that you? We’re coming,” shouted back Polly. “I’m so glad our men got the guns. We need ’em now.—Father, do come! There go the cattle.”

“I can’t save the hogs,” he mourned. “It’s no use. Vine hasn’t force enough to stop ’em. They’ll all be killed. It can’t be they’d really hurt my place.”

“Ugh! Bob heap fool!” sounded almost in his face. “Hess’n come. Redcoat come. King Jaw come. Kill Bob. ’Teal pig. Bob jump!”

He did not jump at all in his unbelief and indecision, but Stuart sprang from his horse and began to help vigorously in packing the most needful and valuable things into the big sleigh.

“You are all to go to the Irwin place,” he said. “It’s furthest up the road, and Vine says it’s the safest. The cattle are to go into the woods beyond.”

“I wish Washington’s army had them,” said Mrs.

Van Tine, "rather than have them stolen for the enemy."

Two stout farm hands were doing good service, and if they had hitherto been Tories their present style of talk showed few traces of any such politics. On drove the sleigh containing the Davis family, and behind it trudged Jim Smith. It was precisely as if somebody had brought word that Irwin Hollow was to be raided by the Iroquois. The consequences to the people seemed to be about the same.

"Father, come!" urged Polly after Stuart helped her into the sleigh. "Why don't you come? We're waiting."

"There's no time to lose," urged his wife. "They're coming!"

"Go, go!" he said, not looking at her, but at his barns and his hayricks and his house. "I must stay and meet the officer in command."

"'Tick heap bay'net into Bob," suggested Indian John, but the man holding the reins of the bay team gave them a sharp crack of his whip and off they started.

The cattle and a spare span of horses were already well away, and the bays were passing through the gate into the road when a redcoated trooper came galloping up, shouting:

"Halt! Where's that sleigh going? Isn't this Van Tine's?"

"I'm Robert Van Tine," responded the squire. "I've always served my King——"

"Don't you send away a pound or a hoof till our troop gets here!" commanded the soldier savagely. "I'll cut down any man that dares."

Out came his saber as he spoke, for he saw no armed men. It was true, and he knew it not, that Indian John was gliding to the fence with his rifle and that the two farm hands were provided with axes and pitchforks. Nearer, instantly facing him, wheeled an unexpected foe, for Stuart was now in the saddle, and the moon, rising above the tree tops, sent a frosty glimmer upon the long curved blade he had unsheathed as he spurred forward.

"Glad he didn't draw a pistol," thought Stuart. "He might hit somebody in the sleigh."

Clash! rasp! click! right sharply rang the parrying, striking sabers. It was a spirit-stirring duel on horseback, for both were well mounted and both knew how to use their weapons.

"O mother!" exclaimed Polly, standing erect in the sleigh.

"Oh, it's dreadful!" added Jessie breathlessly. "Sit down, Polly; you'll fall. There! Oh! Awful!"

A scream of nervous excitement burst from Polly, but it was not a scream of fright. She could not have told why she screamed, for it was the British trooper, not Stuart, that suddenly dropped his saber and wheeled away.

"'Top!" shouted Indian John. "'Tuart heap wait. No follow."

"I didn't mean to," replied Stuart. "All I gave him was a cut on the arm. Sorry he got away."

"O Mr. Stuart!" said Mrs. Van Tine; "I'm glad you didn't kill him. It is awful to kill men."

"They kill us," he said, "and they kill us without mercy. Drive on, boys!"

They were already driving, but the squire was not at once following. His very heart had been in his abundance, in his prosperity, in the important position his riches gave him in all that community. He considered himself, moreover, the leading supporter there of the King and Parliament of Great Britain, and he had expected to be honored accordingly whenever the American rebellion should be put down. He had every just claim to stand as he did in front of his house when, a few minutes later, a small squadron of Hessian cavalry, headed by a British officer as well as a German, came galloping up and halted.

"What does this mean, sir?" roared the officer in

red. "Have you turned rebel? Are you refusing to let your King's men take their foraging?"

"I have been entirely true," very courageously replied the squire, "but one unarmed man can not fight a hundred armed Whigs."

"Hold your tongue!" was the brutally rude rejoinder. "We'll see for ourselves. We'll teach you a lesson.—Dismount, men! Seize him! Seize the house!"

The seizure of the squire meant only that he must stand where he was with a sentry by him and look on at the subsequent proceedings.

More horsemen came, and infantry and sleighs with racks and wagons, and the work of plunder began.

The squire saw his fat hogs butchered and heaped in sleigh after sleigh. He saw his remaining cattle and horses driven out. His ricks of grain and hay began to melt, and then he heard the British commander shout, to be repeated in German:

"Be careful of fire! Don't burn the barns until everything's out of them. We want all the grain, potatoes. Look out for the smokehouse."

"How about the dwelling?" inquired one of the British plunderers.

"Stupid!" roared the officer. "Not till to-morrow. We need it to-night for quarters. We must clean out every room of it before we set it on fire."

“Set my house on fire?” groaned the bewildered squire. “Captain Ross, is this my reward for loyalty? For supporting the King against all odds? What does this mean, sir?”

“Shut up, or you’ll have your throat cut!” was his stern reply. “All you Yankees are traitors at heart. I wouldn’t trust one of you. Our business is to find forage for Lord Cornwallis’s division. Irwin’s Hollow is a rebel nest, anyhow, and we’re going to clean it out from end to end.”

“You should spare the faithful servants of the King,” boldly argued the squire. “We have suffered much for your side and ours. We should not be ruined by our own friends.”

A heavy blow in the face from a sword hilt was his only rejoinder, for the commander of the foraging party was furious at the absence of the drove of cattle he had expected to find. He believed, moreover, that with the squire’s family, as with the Davis family down the road, had been hurried away their most valuable effects. He was nearly correct, for not an ounce of spoons or other silverware had yet turned up to be carried away as “forage” for Lord Cornwallis’s division of the British army.

The sentry or guard stationed to keep the squire a prisoner to his friends stepped away but for one moment.

When he returned to his post his prisoner, the leading Tory of Irwin's Hollow, had vanished. Not only the spot upon which he had stood was vacant, but away up the road marched rapidly a stalwart, middle-aged man, who carried upon each shoulder two of the loaded muskets which a squad of Hessians had stacked near him before going off to plunder his residence. From the fixed bayonets and the barrels of the muskets dangled cartridge boxes to make his load a heavy one, but if he were once a Tory he was asserting angrily as he went:

"I'm a Whig, now and for ever! Hurrah for General Washington! We must shoot every Hessian! Every redcoat! I'll fight. Down with George the Third! Pirates! Murderers! Incendiaries! Thieves! Shoot 'em!"

He did well to walk fast, for his departure was shortly discovered, and at once a bugle sounded the "recall."

"Fall in, men!" shouted Captain Ross. "Mount! We must follow. We must charge through the village. Cut down every soul you see!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIGHT AT THE BRIDGE.



THE Nippitink Creek was roaring full, and now the moon was up and its white light glinted across the snow on the bridge, the black and foaming torrent below sent out pale sparkles.

The blacksmith shop was close to the bank on one side, and on the other was a rude log structure, which had been a cattle pen.

The bridge itself was a heavy affair. The trunks of three trees had been laid down from bank to bank, and upon these thick planks of hemlock, with side rails, were all that had been thought necessary. The planks were not even spiked down, but lay there loose and somewhat rattling.

Vine was a greenhorn in military affairs, but there is what army men call "a natural eye for a good position." Some men see at once what other men can hardly be taught to see, and Vine was thinking hard and studying the position at the creek when Mrs. Cameron said to him:

“The brig is your fort, mon. We can fight them there. What are ye to do wi’ the brig?”

“Men,” shouted Vine, “divide! Half in the cattle pen, half on this side. We’ll have them between two fires if they come.”

“They’ll come,” said Walter Baker. “And they’re burning and plundering as they come. Worse than Indians!”

Jingle! jingle! jingle! it was the sound of merry sleigh bells on the road. A heavily loaded sleigh with heavy-hearted people in it, and yet the bells did dance as the half-frightened horses were lashed to their uttermost exertion. Two sleighs, two sets of bells. First came the Davis family, and the men at the bridge shouted a loud welcome.

“Our house is gone,” called out Mrs. Davis from the sleigh as it came over the bridge. “The Smith house went first. Joe was murdered. We saw other fires beyond down the valley. They’re at Van Tine’s, or they will be——”

“Here they coom,” said Mrs. Cameron. “That’s the bay team.”

There was a harsh jangle in the bells of the Van Tine team, and the voice that announced its arrival was that of Stuart:

“All safe, Irwin. The squire would stay to meet the

British commander, but we've saved all we could. Don't close the bridge till the cattle are over. They're coming."

"So much saved from the British commissaries," almost laughed one of the men. "What they want is beef."

"They'll take all they can lay their hands on," growled another, "but we'll give 'em cold lead this time."

"We're all safe, Vine," shouted Jessie, "and Mr. Stuart fought a trooper."

"Are they so near as that?" asked Vine.

"We haven't any time to spare," said Stuart. "I don't know how strong they are. There come the cattle!"

Lowing, hard driven, the cows and oxen that had so narrowly escaped the British army camp kettles came slowly over the bridge, while the sleighs went on up the road toward the refuge assigned them at the Irwin place.

They did not go far before they were halted in the road.

"I'm going back!" exclaimed Mrs. Van Tine. "I want to see what's become of my husband. The sleigh drove right away from the house with me and left him."

"He's perfectly safe," expostulated the driver.
"Safe as if he wore a red uniform."

"I don't believe it! I'm going!" she said, springing out of the sleigh. "You drive on and take care of things. I saw Mrs. Irwin at the bridge. She didn't come away. I won't!"

The driver could not have prevented their going.

Jessie had jumped out as a matter of course, and now Polly required no help to join her mother and wade back through the snow.

"They won't want us there," she said, "but I mean to be there. I can't shoot, but I can do something. Oh, how I wish I could use a gun!"

"So do I," said her mother. "I'd give anything if your father was on the right side. It's too bad!"

"Can we hold the bridge, Captain Irwin?" asked a broad-shouldered farmer from away up the Hollow.
"They may be too many for us."

"If they cross the bridge," said Vine, "they won't leave one man of us alive. We can hold it, but that isn't all we must do."

"Where Vi?" came at that moment from the bridge itself. "Ugh! Vi, Bob heap mad! Wait. No shut road. Hess'n come pretty quick. Whoop!"

He could whoop splendidly, and it always seemed to

do him good. Hardly, however, had that war cry died away before the defenders of the Hollow could see the burly form of Robert Van Tine striding along with his shoulder loads of British muskets.

“O Robert!” exclaimed his wife, springing forward to meet him; “you are not hurt?”

“Hurt? No!” he shouted fiercely. “God bless you, dear; you and Polly were right.—Vine, here are four more guns. I’m with you. Hurrah for George Washington and the Continental Congress! I’ll keep a musket.”

“Hurrah!” It was a cheer that the entire gathering joined in, and among the voices were several that had cheered for the King until they saw that night the light of the burning farmhouses.

Oh, how Mrs. Van Tine and Polly did hug the squire! but then the men shouted again, for Polly seized one of the muskets, found that it was already loaded, and proceeded to prime with great care the “fire pan” of its flintlock that it might not fail to go off if she should have to use it.

“Keep it, Polly,” said Vine. “We’ve guns enough and to spare now. We’ve armed all that came—boys and all.”

There was not a Hollow boy over twelve that did not know how to handle a gun, and some of them were

pretty good shots, especially with a "rest," such as they were now to have.

"That's a bugle, Irwin," called out Stuart. It was faint and far, but the trooper understood it. "They're coming. The cavalry first."

"The bridge!" shouted Vine. "Up with the middle planks. Every man to his place. Don't fire a shot till you see the foremost horse put his hoofs on the bridge. Then let 'em have it, and keep it up as fast as you can load and fire. Aim close. Don't throw away a shot."

"For all our lives!" sang out Squire Van Tine. "Every fool of a Tory fight for his home and his life."

"Squire," responded a former servant of King George, "there isn't a Tory left in Irwin's Hollow. Joe Smith was a cousin o' mine. Best kind o' feller. They stabbed him in his own barn 'cause he told 'em not to fire it. I'm a dead shot, I am. This 'ere's my own rifle. I shan't miss a shot."

Vine himself was out on the bridge helping tear up the planks in the middle, but they required prying, and came up hard with so much snow on them.

"Quick, Irwin!" shouted Stuart. "There they come."

"One more plank, men," said Vine. "Steady, now. Up with it!"

Up it was lifted, but out of the moonlit shadows down the road came dashing the foremost riders of the troop of Hessians, led by their own officer.

Farther, but a short distance, marched the infantry, the entire detachment numbering perhaps a hundred and fifty men. It was a very strong "foraging party," and would have been a great deal stronger if it had been joined by the Tories that had previously held out for the King along its line of march.

Sabers were out, and the troop expected a free dash through the village until they came to about musket shot of the bridge. They had not seen anything even then that seemed like positive danger, but a glow of fire-light began to dance up from a heap in the middle of the road.

It was the bonfire the boys had wished to make in front of the shop. They had been forbidden to make it there, and they had carried their chips and shavings and old rails across to the other side of the bridge and had left them in the road. Then came so much work and excitement that this part of their night's work had almost been forgotten. Almost, not quite, for when Vine stepped out to fix the bridge more than one form flitted past him, and one of them carried a shovel of coal from the forge.

"Keep that plank across," he said, and then he

shouted, as if something hurt him: "Jessie! Boys! Mrs. Cameron! Why don't you come? Come!"

"We're a' coming," responded Mrs. Cameron. "Ye'll ha' light to shoot by."

Three boys came springing across the one broad plank that spanned the gap in the bridge. Jessie followed like a flash, and her mother was but a pace or two behind her.

It was a terrible moment. There had been a tar bucket emptied upon that pile of fuel, and the flames were dancing high when past them dashed the Hessian horsemen.

"Quick, mother!" gasped Jessie.

"Into the works! Get behind the wagon!" exclaimed Vine.

"Back!" called out Stuart. "You're gone!"

"In, men!" said Vine, and all were in, even Jessie, when he stood at the end of that plank, his gun in one hand, holding out the other to Mrs. Cameron.

"Bless ye, my boy! I'm hurt——"

She staggered past him, and the trooper who had just fired his pistol was reining his horse to leap the narrow gap when Vine jerked up his gun and fired. He struck the horse, not his rider, but the poor animal swerved and plunged headforemost down, with a dull plunge, into the roaring freshet below.

“Mother!” screamed Jessie.

“Hannah Irwin,” said Mrs. Cameron faintly, “it’s a’ ower wi’ me. Tak Jessie for your ain child. God keep ye, Jessie! I’m gane—gane to be wi’ Davie an’ wi’ the King.”

She sank upon the snow, to be at once lifted and carried away, while around her, louder and louder, rang the shouts of the men and the rattle of the musketry.

The Hessian horsemen recoiled at the bridge, only to be fairer marks for the Yankee sharpshooters, and the saddles were emptying rapidly when Captain Ross and his column of foot marched steadily through the confusion.

“Fall back till we clear the bridge!” he shouted. “Halt, men! Give them a volley, then charge. Oh!”

Robert Van Tine himself fired that shot, but the command of Captain Ross was obeyed, although he had fallen.

It was a close volley, and there were shrieks inside the slender breastwork, but the firing from the shop windows, from the cattle pen, and from across the rail piles did not slacken. The unlucky Hessians had been caught in a kind of trap, and their “charge” only carried them to the gap in the middle of the bridge. There they went down like so many ninepins.

It was in vain for their only remaining officer to

strive to rally them. They were falling too fast. Of the troopers, nearly half had pitched off into the snow. The fire in the road and the moonlight enabled the Hollow men to take good aim, and they were as steady as their young captain could have asked for.

"You here?" he suddenly demanded of a man at the breastwork who was loading and firing as if he expected to be paid for it by the shot at a gold piece for every bullet fired.

"They flogged Job Rounds," was the hoarse-toned reply. "He wasn't the right man to flog. They'd hang me now. Hurrah for liberty! Flogging won't do!"

Once more only the enemy made a frantic, desperate rush, and reached the bridge. Several of them crossed the gap by the one plank remaining, put there for Jessie and her mother. Some even leaped across, for they were very brave men and veteran soldiers.

"Steady, men!" shouted Vine. "If they break through we are lost."

It was hand to hand for half a minute, but many of the Hollow men had bayonets, and Walter Baker proved that a sledge hammer was even better if a man knew what to do with one. The men upon whom his hammer fell once had no further use for a bayonet that night. If the men in the cattle pen had wavered it would have been a lost fight, but they kept on firing, and the Hes-

sians on the bridge broke and ran, no more of them crossing the gap. In ten seconds after that not any remained of those who were already over it.

"Polly did use her musket," said Vine. "I saw her fire it twice. I believe she hit the man her father was wrestling with when it was hand to hand."

That had been the turning point of the fight, and Job Rounds himself was forgiven his old Toryism for the manner in which he had stood up to his work at that pinch.

"Vine! Oh, my boy! are you hurt?"

"Not a scratch, mother," he said. "How is Mrs. Cameron? I can't come."

"She has gone, Vine. You needn't come. Jessie'll go home with me. The Van Tines'll go to the Cameron place."

"None of our people will be safe below the bridge," said Vine, "but we can make a kind of fort right here. I wish we had a cannon."

"Poor Jim Smith!" she said, pointing at a form that lay still upon the snow. "That's the end of that family. I don't want to speak of the others."

There were many things told that night that nobody wanted to hear more than once.

A number of the wounded Hessians had been helped away by their comrades, the riderless horses being avail-

able for that purpose, and Vine was not ready yet to attend to anything beyond the creek.

"It's wonderful!" he said to his mother. "We've only three men killed. About a dozen are wounded, none of them badly."

"That's my work," she exclaimed. "Now I know you're safe, I'll go right to 'em. I'm so thankful I know just what to do!"

She darted away enthusiastically just as a hand was laid upon Vine's arm, and he heard:

"Ugh! King Jaw heap mad. Sixty Hess'n kill. Pow-a-hi-tun-ka count 'em. No 'calp 'em."

"How many wounded?" asked Vine, startled by so terrific an account.

"Six tumble in creek. No swim," said the Indian. "Bob put five more in. Say heap dead. No drown. All along the road other side bullet hit 'em. Kill 'em. Old chief see 'em. No get up again. No shoot. No burn house any more. Dead. Ugh!"

It was simply the truth, as they found upon examination. There was not one merely wounded Hessian lying in the road beyond the bridge. There were many good guns and other weapons, however, and there was much precious ammunition.

"I'm afraid they did not all die of shot wounds," said Squire Van Tine, "but it's of no use to question

John. He tells me he is a Tory, and wants to scalp old King George."

The night was far spent when the little force at the bridge felt safe to scatter for its breakfast in the village houses. Word had been brought in that the remnant of the foraging party had halted at the Van Tine place only long enough to get the wagons and sleighs ready. What happened next was announced by a red glare that arose through the frost mist of early dawn.

"All this marauding," said Stuart, "is contrary to General Howe's orders. He will punish that party, especially as they got thrashed for it. But he may send a regiment. The Hollow people will be twice as safe if you are out of it. I must go and report this fight to General Washington."

"If you can get to him," said Vine.

"Indian John says he can guide me," replied Stuart. "I'm off."

"I can't even see you off," said Vine. "I must stay here at the bridge till I'm sure they're gone. Then I want to look at Uncle Bob's place."

"Good-by!" shouted Stuart, mounting to ride away. "Bring supplies for our men if you can."

He was gone, and so was Indian John. Vine was left to finish up things at the Hollow, and he had a sad job of it.

"I feel as if I were a hundred years old," he said to his mother that next evening. "I shall never be a boy any more."

"Yes, you will," she replied. "I'm glad they only burned Robert's barn and not the house. But you'd better have some sleep. You must be tougher than any hickory I know of."

"No, mother," said Vine, "I can't go to bed. I must keep up for one day more."

"It's night," she said.

"There'll only be half a dozen of us at the bridge," he told her, "and I must be there. We'll get things settled, and then as soon as I can I'm off to the army."

"I've thought of that," she replied. "It's just as Stuart says. You'd be safer there than here after what's happened. I can go back to Indian John's wigwam, and Robert and Sarah and Polly and Jessie can go with me if there's any danger."


"Better go pretty soon," said Vine. "Take things there as fast as you can. Any danger that comes'll be sudden. You must sleep now, if I can't. Poor Jessie! She's an orphan."

"No, she isn't," said Mrs. Irwin. "She's my daughter now as long as I live."

"Be careful of yourself, then," came back very earnestly, "or she and I won't have any mother."

CHAPTER XVII.

TURK AND HIS RIDER.

“ I wear moccasin. Keep shoe. Wear legging. Be heap Susquehannock. 'Calp Seneca one day. Big knife.”

The red man had shown from time to time an extraordinary amount of personal pride in the performances of Vine Irwin. It was a good deal as if he had adopted the young soldier into his tribe, and expected him to bring the scalps of their enemies to his own wigwam. There was good sense in his advice about moccasins, however, for there was not a shoemaker in the Hollow, while there were several makers of such footgear as had been worn there before any pale faces came.

Pretty quickly at this juncture there were “squaws” as of old to do the needlework that could not so well be done by the hands of a warrior. Indian John came back from piloting Stuart across the hills to report that the whole country was in the hands of the British. Washington’s army had been driven clean across the

Delaware, and that river was now frozen, a rare thing for the month of December.

The season, cold as it was, had been a good one for deer, and they had brought skins as well as venison to the stone wigwam in the ravine and to the villagers. Mrs. Irwin and her friends had something to make mocasins out of, and hardly any of the valley families failed to need all they could get.

"If we can't fight, we can hunt," Vine had said, and all the young fellows, and some of the old, agreed with him.

As soon as it was safe a large party had been down to look at the Van Tine place. The house was there and the furniture was in it, but the barns and ricks were gone. It was not considered a safe place for anybody to stay in, for squads of redcoated horsemen had been seen in the lower valley.

Day after day went by in a kind of quiet, although Vine and Indian John turned their deer hunts into scouting expeditions, and took more than one pretty close look at the camps and quarters of the nearest British forces. It was all they could do, and Irwin's Hollow was practically without trustworthy news. Its people did not know what was doing in the outside world, nor whether there was any longer a Congress or a Continental army. Hundreds of other communities, not only

in the Jerseys, but throughout the country, were in a similar condition. Everywhere there was gloom and desolation, and in too many minds there came a subdued, hopeless feeling, as if the war for independence was over—as if the battle for freedom had been fought and lost.

“Mother,” said Polly, “if Jessie didn’t spend so much of her time here I’d feel dreadfully about living in her house. She says she has two homes, anyway.”

“Three, I should say,” replied Mrs. Van Tine. “She goes away out to Indian John’s wigwam. Nobody knows where that is.”

“I do,” said Polly. “I’ve been there.”

“But I told you not to tell me anything about it,” exclaimed her mother. “I don’t want to know. Not unless the Hessians should come again. I’m glad there is a hiding place.”

They did not know that Washington himself had said to his intimate friends that, if Congress should give up, he and they would retreat into the Indian country and fight on. Neither did Vine know that the general had inquired of Stuart:

“Who commanded the militia in the fight at the Nippitink bridge?”

“Captain Vine Irwin, sir,” replied Stuart.

"I'll make a note of that," said the general. "It was a well-managed affair."

So thought the Hollow men, and a number of young fellows were getting tired of their dull winter, cooped up where they could not know what was going on in the outer world. They could chop and haul cord wood and fence rails. They could hunt in the forests and catch fish through the ice of the ponds, and they could take turns in mounting guard at the bridge. The works here were now pretty strong, so that no small party of marauders was likely to try and break through; but even regular soldiers hate the dullness of mere "garrison service."

One of the best soldiers in the valley had not performed any guard duty, but had come and gone at his will.

"Ugh!" he said to Vine at last. "Vi go on war-path? Come with Pow-a-hi-tun-ka. Look at Hess'n. 'Calp 'em. See own army. No 'tay in Hollow. Men all ready. What say?"

"Vine," said his mother, listening to the Susquehannock, "go! See if you can learn what's become of your father. I'm wild to know. Find out what's become of Washington's army. I want to know if we have a country or if it's really conquered. Take your men and go!"

That settled the matter, but the going was by night and in secret, lest an enemy should know and should betray, for no less than three large sleigh loads of supplies went along, with a dozen well-armed men. At their head was Turk, dancing hither and thither across the frosty road, and now and then making spirited remarks to the pony that carried Indian John and to other friends of his among the teams.

The going was pretty good, and the sleighs slipped along under cargoes that wagons could not have taken.

"We set out just before dark," said Vine to his men. "If we can reach McKonkey's Ferry by daylight tomorrow morning we shall carry a Christmas present to the army."

"If it's there. If there's any army left," came gloomily back. "Anyhow, the Hessians at Trenton'll be quiet enough such a night as this."

Only just such tough and daring fellows as they were would have pushed forward, for the northwest wind was rising, and was bringing with it rain and hail and sleet. Even Turk quieted as the dismal hours went by, and was willing to trudge along steadily, while Vine wrapped his blanket around him and thought pretty seriously of what might happen if there should be no boats at the ferry so that he could not cross the Delaware River.

"We would all be in the Hessian camp before noon

to-morrow," he said; "or, more likely, they'd bayonet us."

He knew the risk he was running, and so did his men, but it was the night before Christmas, and not a solitary picket of the enemy did they encounter. Just in the darkest hour of the winter night Indian John rode to Vine's side to say:

"Ugh! Look ahead! Heap lantern."

Only eyes like his could have discerned the faint glimmers which he pointed out, but before it could be guessed what they might be a voice in the blackness before them demanded:

"Who goes there? Halt!"

"Washington's army! Supplies!" shouted Vine, for there could be no hesitation now. "Men, forward! Take him!"

"Hurrah!" was the quick response. "Advance, Supplies, whoever you are! This is the Third Virginia."

"All right!" came in a chorus from the Hollow men. "Captain Irwin, we're just in time."

"You are," sounded from the darkness. "We can eat anything. Eat it raw. Fetch it along!"

That was precisely what the brave, half-starved, half-frozen fellows did with hams and bacon and salt pork. It was not a time for cooking. No fires were to be kin-

dled, for this was a secret march, a night attack upon the Hessians camped at Trenton. Not much could be seen by the dim lantern light, but Vine left the sleigh loads and pushed forward with all but three of his men.

“ Captain,” said one of them, “ it’s awful! Look at the bare feet! ”

“ Look at the blood marks on the snow! ” exclaimed another. “ That’s from frost cracks.”

“ Some of ’em can hardly stand for hunger,” groaned Vine. “ Bare legs, bare heads. What men of iron to hold out, to fight on! ”

Just then he heard a voice he remembered saying:

“ The supplies were brought by Captain Irwin, of Irwin’s Hollow, general.”

“ Thank him for me, Stuart. The cannon are all over. Where is my horse? ”

“ Take mine! ” burst from the lips of Vine as he dashed forward and sprang to the ground. “ Best horse in all New Jersey. Oh, general, take him! ”

“ Thank God for sending him at this hour, my boy,” replied the commander in chief, stepping forward.

In an instant he was in the saddle and Turk was curveting proudly, as if he knew what honor had been done him.

“ There is a good spyglass in the case, and there are

pistols in the holsters," said Vine. "He can run like the wind."

"Heap good hoss," added Indian John. "Gen'l catch Hess'n. Vi no talk. Shoot a heap. Ugh! Whoop!"

He began that war whoop, but he at once suppressed it, although all the wild blood in him was rising to fever heat at the prospect not only of a big fight, but of a surprise attack managed upon thoroughgoing Susquehannock principles.

"Every man counts," said Stuart, dismounting and walking on at the side of his friend. "Two of our divisions didn't get across the river. They won't be here, but the general means to attack with what we have."

"I wish there were more of us," said Vine. "I brought the best men in the Hollow. Glad he's on Turk."

"His own horses were used up," replied Stuart. "That man never rests. He's made of wrought iron. But the way our men have suffered is awful. Vine, do you hear that? It's General St. Clair."

Vine had listened, and he had heard:

"Orders from General Sullivan, sir. Reports powder wet. Muskets useless."

"Push on and use the bayonet," sharply responded St. Clair. "Tell him he has nothing else to do."

"Tell him to advance and charge!" shouted the commander in chief.

"Aye, aye, sir!" and away galloped the messenger, while Vine said to Stuart:

"I didn't know the general was so near."

"He's going to lead this column," said Stuart. "He'll be the first man into Trenton. I must go to my company."

He was gone, but Vine and his squad of Irwin's Hollow men had no other post of duty.

"Vi follow old chief," said Indian John. "Catch Hess'n asleep. 'Calp 'em!"

The troops did not reach their several positions as early as had been planned, but the increasing storm prevented any discovery of their movements. They were to rush in by several roads at the same time, the strongest column marching down the main street of the large and somewhat straggling town.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning of Christmas day, but the sweeping sleet and the mist made a cover to hide anything at a hundred yards' distance.

"There!" exclaimed Vine. "Men, forward! That's the alarm!"

A shot, a dozen of them, a roll of drums, a shrill scream of a cavalry bugle, the shouts of men, told that

the Hessian garrison of the post of Trenton had discovered the approach of an enemy.

“Forward! Charge!” sounded at the head of the several American columns, and was repeated along their lines. Weary men who had walked waveringly straightened up and strode forward. Sick men who had tottered seemed to feel new life, and shouted like their well comrades. The bleeding feet were forgotten, and the half-frozen ceased to shudder. This was the victory those splendid men had won—the victory of endurance, the hero victory.

On charged the cheering ranks, their bayonets glittering through the sheets of icy rain. On in advance rode Washington and the few mounted men who were with him.

Already the astonished Hessians were getting into shape. They were opening a sharp fire from the windows of some of the houses. At the head of the main street a couple of six-pounder cannon had been stationed previously, but these iron watchers were alone at their post when the alarm bugle sounded to summon the artillerymen. Out poured these from their quarters to hastily load with grape and canister and sweep the close array of the charging Continentals.

“Forward!” shouted an officer near the general, “Quick! Before they can fire!”

It was Captain William Washington, of the cavalry, and with him was Lieutenant James Monroe of the Third Virginia, Vine's regiment for that battle.

It was a swift rush, a run, for a prize of untellable value. Monroe and the captain reached the gun at the right as the Irwin's Hollow men and a few more plunged in among the Hessians around the gun on the left. The cannon were ready to fire, and the American commander in chief was within a few yards of their muzzles. If the matches should be applied!

Down went Captain Washington, a bullet in his arm. Down went James Monroe, shot through the shoulder, but the Virginians won that cannon.

"The match!" shouted Vine. "Stop——" A blow of a clubbed musket felled him at the side of the six-pounder, but over him sprang a dark shape that seemed taller than usual.


Out rang the Susquehannock war whoop, down went the artilleryman who held the match, the Continental bayonets flashed bloodily for a second or so, and all was safe. The battle of Trenton was won in the taking of those guns, but it was a boy and an Indian who prevented a terrible defeat and the utter ruin of an army which would then and there have disbanded if Washington had fallen and left it without a general.



Out rang the Susquehannock war-whoop.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE YORKTOWN FLAGS.

“GH! Vi 'tand up! Hess'n 'tick bay'net in him? No? Good! Vi heap cap'n.”

John's first duty after the charging column rushed past was to pick up Vine and set him upon his feet. He had been stunned, but was not otherwise hurt, and none of the Hollow men were seriously injured. As they were not attached to any particular regiment, they were well contented to remain, as Vine was requested by General St. Clair, and stand guard over those guns in the main street for the time being.

The brilliant battle of Trenton was a perfect victory, and now the Continentals went forward to gather and secure the fruits of their heroism. These included over a thousand prisoners, with cannon, flags, arms, and ammunition. The latter, also, was dry, and the victors would no longer be compelled to rely altogether upon the bayonet. Added to all these good things were several warehouses full of articles of camp equipage, cloth-

ing, blankets, and shoes. The business of distributing these began at once, and the old Susquehannock took an especial interest in it. After a company of artillerists came to relieve him and Vine from further responsibility for the captured cannon, his next appearance was at the new Hessian shoe shop kept by General Sullivan and Company.

"Sojer put on 'tocking," he gravely remarked. "Now, shoes. 'Tamp! Ugh! hurt foot? 'Marts! Feel pretty good by and by. Heap run away."

Another important result of the victory at Trenton was its effect upon the men. Of those who marched and fought that night over fourteen hundred were no longer in the army, for their terms of enlistment had expired, and they were free to go home. They were not under pay, and they could not be at once re-enlisted, but every man of them agreed to stay long enough to fight at least one more battle that seemed to be close at hand. Their first march was only to the river bank to be ferried back across the Delaware, prisoners and all, for they were not strong enough in numbers to hold the post they had captured.

The next morning, when Vine awoke in his sleigh after a long deep sleep, he was informed by his men that nothing had been seen of Indian John. He had not crossed the river with them.

"Just like him!" said Vine. "I'd give something to know what he's up to."

It would have been worth while. After a general inspection from point to point, intensely enjoying all he saw, he had soberly declared:

"Sojer got Hess'n. No 'calp 'em. Got heap blanket, heap gun. 'Teal 'em all. Old King Jaw heap sick. Pow-a-hi-tun-ka Tory now. Go see Wally. Tell him big lie. Have good time. 'Tir him up."

At this very hour, therefore, in spite of British sentries or similar hindrances to another kind of man, he was in the middle of a group of scarlet uniformed officers answering their eager questions concerning the American army and the Trenton battle.

"Old chief heap Seneca," he asserted. "Heap Tory. Love King Jaw. Come 'calp rebel. Kill a heap. Come tell Wally where find old Washington."

"Where is he?" sharply demanded a British general officer. "Our scouts can not tell us."

"'Cout heap fool," gravely responded the Susquehannock. "No try find him. 'Fraid get wet. Hide in house, like Hess'n. Get caught, like woodchuck. Rebel walk on snow, heap trap 'em."

"Fact!" said the officer sternly. "That's the way Colonel Rahl lost his post and his life. Well, chief, go on. Tell all you found out."

“All rebel take boat,” said John. “All cross Delaware. Take cannon. Take Hess’n. Redcoat chief ’tep quick or Washington get away.”

It was already too late for interference with Washington’s rapid movements, but John’s information was startling if not valuable. At first he was not believed, but, when careful reconnoitering confirmed him, he was accepted as a truthful servant of the British crown. All the Iroquois were so regarded. His present scouting, they said, had been well done. He brought them an immense amount of accurate information concerning the exact condition, numbers, arms, and movements of the Continental forces, and he was like a map of the country for what he told them of its hills, waters, and roads.

“He must go to General Cornwallis,” was the undoubting decision, and he was provided with a pony to go on.

“Chief go see Wally,” replied John. “Tell him what do. ’Tir him up.”

Nevertheless, it was the second day before he stood face to face with the very able British general who had been so astounded by the news of the Trenton disaster to his German troops.

Once more the grim Susquehannock was permitted the enjoyment of answering endless questions, and he

created a strong impression that he was about the best spy and scout that Lord Cornwallis had in his army.

"Where old King Jaw?" asked John at last. "Old chief want see him."

"What for?" asked his lordship, not a little amused by so remarkable a request.

"Tell him come 'calp Wally. Let rebel army get away."

"I shall not do it again!" he exclaimed, but there was a broad smile on the faces of several who heard.

"Wally want lose more Hess'n?" asked John. "Old chief tell him how."

"Tell it! What do you mean?" said the general testily.

"Wally marts Hess'n into Trenton," said John. "Tell 'em eat heap. Drink heap. Go sleep in house. Old Washington there again to-morrow. Trap 'em. 'Calp 'em. 'Calp Wally, too. Better 'tay awake. Red-coat, Hess'n, Tory, heap fool! All 'tay in house when rain."

"Gentlemen," said the general to his officers, "the old redskin is too nearly right to suit me. At all events, Washington shall not entrap any more of our men in Trenton."

His scattered detachments were fast gathering. The

next morning, December 28th, he was compelled to declare:

“Washington once more in Trenton? The Indian scout was right, after all. Now we’ll see if I haven’t trapped some rebels.”

Twice as many Continentals as had fought on Christmas Day, or about five thousand, had crossed the Delaware this time, but they were still too few for a pitched battle with Cornwallis. Washington knew the forces opposed to him, for hardly had he re-entered Trenton before two men came to see him. One of them at once offered to shake hands with him, but the other was not quite so free. He seemed a little uncertain, not to say diffident.

Washington shook hands with John, but the first thing he said was:

“Irwin, my orderly will give you back your horse. Thank you.”

“You may keep him if you will. I’d be so glad,” began Vine.

“No, sir. I’ve enough,” said the general. “You will need him. I shall not. When we get into winter quarters, bring all the supplies you can. We shall not need any more men until spring.”

“I’ll bring a whole company.”

“Vi ’top talk,” interposed John impatiently. “Keep

hoss. Old chief been to see Wally. See all British army. See Hess'n. Too many. Washington no fight 'em."

The commander in chief was an old hand with Indians, and he perfectly comprehended Pow-a-hi-tun-ka. He hardly disturbed him by a question while the Susquehannock gave him the details of his talks with Cornwallis and the other British officers. At the end of it he again shook hands with him heartily, thanked him, and asked him to come again very much as if John had been another American general.

The Indian felt more than paid in gratified pride. It was the grandest moment of his life, and he walked out of Washington's quarters with Vine as if his whole tribe had been concentrated into its last Jersey representative.

Vine, too, was proud, but his thoughts were interrupted by a loud neigh, and the next moment he and Turk were expressing their great pleasure at meeting again.

"Washington could have him and welcome," thought Vine. "But if he doesn't need him, I'd feel queer going home without him. Well, unless he's to carry the general, I'd rather he'd carry me!"

Then he was in the saddle, and Indian John went off for an inspection of the American lines, remarking:

“Pow-a-hi-tun-ka great chief. 'Calp Wally for Washington. 'Calp King Jaw.”

He was not disposed to try another expedition within the British camps, but “Wally” and his increasing forces were pressing closer every hour.

The information brought by the Susquehannock was all that Washington required to decide upon his next movement.

The old, great year of 1776 went out and the new year of 1777 came in, and all the Continentals had been ferried to the north bank of the Delaware. During New Year's Day and all the next day the ragged regiments, not quite so ragged as they had been, thanks to the Trenton victory a week ago, were getting ready for a long march. Every wagon was packed and every company had its orders by the sunset of January 2d. There was much sharp skirmishing along the creek that day, but when the darkness came the British pickets and outposts saw the American camp fires all ablaze as usual, proving that the army was still there. They were watching closely, for the preparations of Cornwallis were complete, and Washington's troops, hemmed in at Trenton, with the icy, foaming Delaware behind them, were to be crushed and captured the next morning. As it was expressed by Indian John:

“Wally come. Rebel all sleep. ’Calp ’em. Trap Washington. Heap tickle King Jaw.”

No doubt the King would have been pleased exceedingly but for the failure of the trap. It was a good trap, but there was nothing in it.

The fires were burning high, but the Continental army was marching away. Camp after camp was deserted, and even the quarters in Trenton had no occupant. Military stores, guns, prisoners, all were gone, and they had made no noise in going.

A little group stood in the main street of Trenton, on the spot where the cannon had been captured, and near them were four two-horse wood sleighs.

“Now, Cap’n Irwin,” said one of the men, “we’re ready. What is it? What are we to do?”

“I didn’t know what it was when I volunteered,” replied Vine, “but I told General St. Clair we would do it. The camp fires out yonder must burn till morning to cheat the British if it costs you and me our lives. We are here to save the army!”

“Ugh!” exclaimed Indian John. “Heap fool old Wally. Whoop!”

There was no reason why he should not whoop his loudest, and the Irwin’s Hollow men cheered vigorously as they sprang into the sleighs and hurried away to load with wood for their perilous duty. They were all the

force left, they and the camp fires, to face ten thousand bayonets. They were experienced wood haulers, and fuel had been abundantly prepared.

"Heap 'em! Heap 'em!" shouted the excited Indian again and again. "Put on big log. Heap fire fool Wally! 'Raw for King Jaw! 'Calp 'em!"

The fires were many, and some of them were within musket range of the opposite bank of the creek where the British fires were burning. All night long from time to time the wood sleighs made their rounds, but the morning began to dawn at last, and with it would surely come discovery. Almost as surely would come sudden death if the Hollow men were discovered at their work.

"Hark!" exclaimed Vine. "Hold up, men! Our job's done."

The thunder of heavy guns sounded from beyond the creek, and an iron messenger from one of them came crashing, splintering, through the sleigh beside him.

"Ugh!" said John. "Hear drum. Wally all awake. All Hess'n come now. No 'tand 'till. Trap Washington."

The British army was indeed already on the alert. Its artillery were getting into position, firing as they did so, and the cannon shot dropped rapidly among the deserted camp fires and even in the streets of Trenton.

The gray dawn brightened. From all their gathered divisions, in fine array, the veteran regiments of Great Britain and the serried lines of the German mercenaries moved steadily forward, flags waving, drums beating, fifes screaming, while the bugle calls of the cavalry answered each other from wing to wing of the army which was about to destroy the last hope of American independence.

“Wally come!” shouted Indian John as the artillery roared again.

“Cavalry come,” said Vine. “They are our danger. Drive on now. I guess we can get away. Steady, men!”

On went the sleighs, but Vine did not at once go with them. When the foremost files of the advancing British horsemen paused for a moment at the creek waiting for orders to charge, they saw an American trooper on a splendid black horse galloping along the entire front of the Continental camp. He swung his hat as he went, and was answered by volleys of musketry.

“I’ve halted every regiment of ’em somehow,” exclaimed Vine. “The sleighs are two miles away by this time. There comes the cavalry. Now, Turk, for life!”

Away sprang the black racer just as the bugles

sounded the charge, but the British cavalry were hindered by the creek, while the last man of Washington's army passed swiftly out of sight.

Cornwallis had come, as Indian John had said he would, but the battle he came to win was not there to be fought. Washington had decided to fight a very different battle at another place that day a number of miles away.

The cavalry dashed wildly through the silent camping ground, and all the dancing fires seemed to mock them, for they did not even know in which direction to follow that lonely horseman. Not many minutes later he was shouting:

"On, men! Keep the bells a-jingling! We'll all get back to Irwin's Hollow."

Lord Cornwallis himself stared angrily around at the empty "trap" he had hoped to catch an army in, and remarked:

"I wish I could see that old Indian. He could tell me what has become of Washington."

All the general could do was to push on and try to find him, but the next news of him that came to even Indian John was from a thunder of cannon and a rattle of musketry hours later at some distance in advance of the wood-sleigh party. It was the sound of the brief but decisive battle of Princeton, for Washington had

struck another heavy blow, almost equal in importance to that of Trenton.

“Old King Jaw ’calp Wally,” said John. “Rebel get away again. Kill heap more Hess’n. Now Vi go home tell Bob. ’Tay home all winter. Have good time.”

Such were Vine’s orders from Washington himself, for after their second victory the Continentals were quickly on their way to a secure winter camp among the wooded heights near Morristown.

Sharp winter weather set in, and it was not advisable for the British army to follow into that region. They found quarters here and there for themselves, choosing them where they would, for the New Jersey people were helpless. They took and held them in such a manner, with such cruelty to the people, that before the snows of that winter melted there were no longer any Tories worth speaking of. Ten battles won by the American armies could not so utterly have lost the State to the British crown.

It was a long hard winter, full of privations for the patriots in the camps at Morristown and elsewhere, but it was a quiet time in Irwin’s Hollow. Once there came a small sensation, an unexpected visitor, a man on furlough from the army on his way to Virginia for recruits, but willing to spend a few days with old friends. Squire

Van Tine's house was now in pretty good condition again, and he was eager to entertain a Continental soldier as strong a Whig as himself. When at last the Virginian departed, he said to him:

"Fill up your company, Stuart. We will fight 'em to the bitter end. Vine's drilling his men. He'll have a prime lot. Always come and see us whenever you can. We're all Whigs in this Hollow."

That may have been so, but a fortnight earlier one of the oldest settlers there had been at the Irwin place to show the red-headed medicine squaw his new snowshoes and say to her:

"Pow-a-hi-tun-ka heap Tory. Go see Six Nation. 'Calp Seneca for old King Jaw. Mebbe go see Wally. Tell him where find Washington. 'Tir him up."

Nothing more was seen of him for many a long day, but Vine managed to collect and deliver more than one trainload of supplies for the army he was to join in the spring.

.
"Ugh! Wally tell Hess'n to marts out and put down gun. Wally go home."

It was a fine October day in the year 1781, and the old Susquehannock stood upon a gentle rise of ground on the bank of the James River, Virginia. Drawn out

upon the level ground right and left of him were two allied armies, horse, foot, and artillery. It looked like a grand parade, but it was something more. At the heads of the columns of one army and from the masts of many ships in the river floated white standards embroidered with the golden lilies of France. A few of the smaller craft carried the Stars and Stripes, like the banners of the other, the American Continental army.

In full view and at no great distance were the badly shattered works erected by the British when General Lord Cornwallis gathered all his forces south of New York to be entrapped at Yorktown by the genius of the American commander. Over these works and over ships in the river still fluttered in the breeze the red cross flag of England, but from all the gaps and gates of the lines were now marching out, with somber steadiness and perfect drill, the splendid British army whose surrender was also the surrender of the right of the King of Great Britain to rule the thirteen revolted colonies.

"Hear gun!" said John. "Vi look! Old red-head medicine squaw look!"

"O Vine!" exclaimed Mrs. Irwin. "I'm so glad I'm here!—Jessie, I almost feel sorry for them."

"I don't," said Jessie. "That was the signal gun. Down come the British flags!"

"Our men are commanded not to cheer, Captain Irwin. I'm glad of it."

"So am I, Colonel Stuart," said Mrs. Irwin. "But you'll have great news to send to Polly. The squire, too. He thinks Washington's the greatest man that ever lived."

"So he is," said Vine, but he was not in shape to talk, for the noble-looking black horse under him was plunging and curveting in an extravagant manner.

"Be quiet, Turk!" he said. "Don't you hear? Cornwallis has surrendered."

A loud, shrill neigh answered him, while up the flagstaffs of the forts went the Stars and Stripes, and upon all the captured shipping arose the flag of France.

The British and Hessian troops stacked their arms and gave up their furled colors sadly enough, but even they were glad the war was over.

"Mother," exclaimed Vine, "here comes father in his new uniform."

"You can be prouder of him than ever, Mrs. Irwin," said Stuart. "He's only a major now, but he was the first man over the rampart when Lafayette stormed the redoubt, and he is to be promoted. Vine and his Hollow men were just behind him."

"Ugh!" said Indian John. "Vi heap fight. Go home, hoe potato. Red-head medicine squaw go back

to ho'pital. Cure 'em all. Old chief go see Wally. Ask him how he feel now. King Jaw 'calp him, let rebel get away."

"I want to go home, too, Mrs. Irwin," said Jessie very gravely. "I'm as proud of Vine as you are. But, oh, I'm glad the war is over! The country is worth it. Liberty is worth it. But it has cost so much! I wish father and mother were here."

So Cornwallis surrendered, and before long there were no armies to speak of—British, French, or Continental—in America.

Peace came, but it was a costly peace. It had been paid for by the lives of fathers, brothers, sons, and even of mothers like Elsie Cameron. The battles fought to win it had been lost or gained by heroes who marched to them with bleeding feet and faint with famine. Among the men who stood with Washington at the close were thousands who had been mere boys when first they shouldered their muskets, but who had grown to be men as tough as hickory while enduring the frosts, the heats, the privations, the toils of the long, long years of the glorious struggle for the eternal freedom of the American people.

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